

JACK

VOL. II

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ALPHONSE DAUDET

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J A C K

Vol. II

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Alphonse Daudet

J A C K

In Two Volumes

Vol. II



Translated by

Laura Ensor

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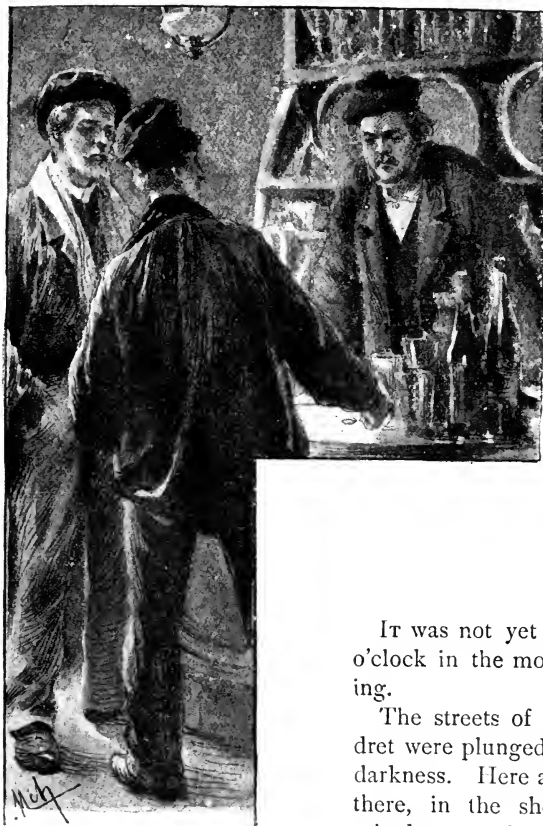
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v.

DRUNKENNESS.



The keen and salt-laden breeze drove the boat. . . .



It was not yet six o'clock in the morning.

The streets of Indret were plunged in darkness. Here and there, in the shop-windows of the bakers or wine-sellers, a smoky light

appeared in the fog, as if from behind an oiled paper, with the pale and dim spreading of a ray that cannot pierce. In one of these taverns, close to the blazing and

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roaring stove, Roudic's nephew and his apprentice were seated and talking while they drank.

"Come, Jack, one round more."

"No, thanks, Monsieur Charlot. I am not in the habit of drinking. I am afraid of its hurting me."

The Nantais laughed :

"What next ! A Parisian like you—you are joking. Hi ! you barman, two glasses more stiff and look sharp about it !"

The apprentice dared not refuse. The attentions lavished upon him by so great a man flattered him hugely. And with good reason indeed. The designer usually so haughty and so proud, who in the past eighteen months had not spoken three times to him, had, on meeting him by chance this morning in Indret, done him the honour of addressing him as a comrade, of taking him to the public house, and of treating him to three glasses of differently coloured spirits. This was so extraordinary that Jack at first felt some distrust. The man's manner was so strange, he asked with so much persistence : "Anything new at the Roudics ? nothing really ?"

The apprentice thought to himself :

"Ah ! if you think you will get me to do your errands like Bélisaire !"

But this evil impression did not last long. After the second round of spirits, he felt more at his ease, more reassured. After all, this Nantais did not seem such a very bad fellow ; he had been more unfortunate than wicked, led astray by his passions. Who knows ? Perhaps, to bring him back to the right path, he needed only an outstretched hand ; perhaps a friendly word would be enough to induce him to give up play and to respect his uncle's household.

At the third glass, Jack became effusive and filled with

an extraordinary warmth of heart, he offered his friendship to the Nantais, who accepted it with gratitude ; and now that they were friends, Jack set himself at once to give advice :

“ Shall I tell you something, Nantais ? Well, take my advice ; don’t gamble any more.”

The thrust was straight and went home, for a nervous movement twitched the designer’s lip (emotion no doubt) and he gulped down his glass of brandy abruptly. Jack seeing the effect produced did not stop at this :

“ And then, there is another thing I should like to say to you.”

Fortunately, the voice of the tavern-keeper interrupted them, for this time, the Nantais would have had some difficulty in hiding his feelings.

“ Hi, lads, there’s the bell.”

In the chill morning air, a monotonous and gloomy tolling mingled with the sound of the hoarse coughing and the clanking of the wooden shoes of the silent crowd, as it wended its way up the hilly street.

“ Come,” said Jack, “ we must be off.”

And as his friend had stood the first two glasses, he insisted on paying for the third, delighted to pull a gold piece from his pocket and to throw it on the counter saying : “ Pay yourself.”

“ By Jove, a yellow boy !” said the tavern-keeper, little accustomed to see similar coins issue from the pockets of an apprentice.

The Nantais said nothing, but he started. Could this fellow have been at the cupboard too ? Jack was triumphant at their astonishment.

“ And there are more behind it !” said he, slapping his pocket ; then leaning towards the designer’s ear :

“ It is for a present I am going to make to Zénaïde.”

"Really," replied the other with an evil smile.

The barman continued to turn the coin over and over with a certain amount of uneasiness.

"Come, hurry up!" said Jack. "You will make me miss the flag."

And, in fact, although the bell still rang, it was with slower strokes, as if it lacked strength for the last call. At length, the change given, they went out together arm-in-arm.

"What a pity, my old Jack, that you are obliged to go back to your shop. The Saint-Nazaire boat does not start for an hour. I should have liked so much to stay a little longer with you. It really does me good to hear you. Ah! if only I had always been advised like that!"

And gently, very gently, he drew the apprentice towards the banks of the Loire. Jack offered no resistance. After the thick warm atmosphere of the wine-shop, the cold of the street coming on the top of the third glass had seized hold of him. He walked as if giddy, stumbled at every step, and the frozen ground being very slippery he leant with all his might upon the arm of his new friend in order not to fall. It seemed to him that he had just received a tremendous blow on the head, or that his skull was being squeezed into a hat made of lead. But this only lasted for a few minutes.

"Wait a moment," said he. "I don't seem to hear the bell any more."

"Impossible."

They turned back. A faint streak of daylight was tearing the dark sky asunder, lighting it up just over the iron-works. The flag was gone. Jack was terrified. It was the first time such a thing had happened to him. But the most distressed of the two was the Nantais.

"It is my fault, my fault," he repeated. He talked of

going to find the manager to intercede, to explain that he alone was the guilty one. In his turn the apprentice was obliged to reassure him.

"Pooh! never mind. It won't be the death of me to be marked 'absent' on the time-keeper's board for once. It will give us a longer time together. I will go with you as far as the boat and come back in time for the ten o'clock bell. I shall get off with a row from old Lebescam."

It was just this row that he dreaded. But the dread could not compete with the joy and pride he experienced in hanging on the Nantais' arm, and the conviction he felt that he had brought him back to more upright sentiments. In this strain it was, that he continued to talk to him as they descended towards the river, beneath the great trees white with hoar frost, and he put so much force and action into his words, that he felt neither the bitter black cold of the morning, nor the north wind sharp as a knife. He spoke of old Roudic, so good, so affectionate, so confiding; of Clarisse, who, with everything that could be wished for to make her happy, was a pitiable sight with her pale face and the startled wild look that came into her eyes at times.

"Ah! if you could have seen her this morning when I left! She was so white, she looked like a corpse."

As he spoke thus, the apprentice felt the Nantais' arm tremble within his own, which proved clearly to him that there was some heart left yet in this fellow.

"She said nothing to you, Jack? Really, she said nothing?"

"Nothing, not a word, Zénaïde was talking to her, she did not answer. She ate nothing. I am afraid she is ill."

"Poor woman!" said the Nantais, with a sigh of relief,

which the child took for sadness, and which filled him with pity.

"Enough for once," thought he, "I must not be too hard on him."

They neared the quay. The boat had not yet come up. A thick fog lay over the river from one shore to the other.

"Suppose we go in there," said the Nantais.

It was a shed built of boards, with benches inside to shelter the workmen awaiting the ferry on wet days. Clarisse knew that shed well! And the old woman who had installed herself in a corner with her little traffic of corn brandy and black coffee had many a time seen Madame Roudic waiting for the ferry-boat, and crossing the Loire in weather "not fit for a dog to be out in."

"It's a biting air this morning, lads. Won't you take a drop?"

Jack would consent to take a drop only on condition of paying for it, and he even hailed a sailor who was shivering on guard at the foot of the semaphore to come and drink with them. The sailor and the Nantais tossed off their brandy, which disappeared down their throats by magic. The apprentice imitated them; but what he could not imitate was the appreciative smile, the smack of satisfaction the sailor gave, as he wiped his lips on the cuff of his sleeve. Terrible drop indeed! It seemed to Jack that he had swallowed all the slag of the furnace. Suddenly the scream of a whistle cut through the fog. The Saint-Nazaire steam-boat! They must part now; but promises were exchanged of an early meeting.

"You are a good fellow, Jack, and I thank you for your good advice."

"Say no more. It's not worth mentioning," answered Jack, vigorously shaking the Nantais' hand and quite



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astonished to find himself as much moved as if he were quitting a friend of twenty years' standing. "Above all, Charlot, remember what I have said to you. Play no more."

"Oh no, never again," said the other, hastening on board that his young friend might not see him burst out laughing.

When the Nantais was gone, Jack had not the least wish to return to the workshops. He felt an unwonted cheerfulness in his heart, and in every vein such a coursing of the blood that he felt like shouting, running and gesticulating. Even the white fog stretched over the Loire, crossed now and again by great black vessels that glided through it like shadows on the wall, seemed to him cheerful and attractive, as if he were possessed of wings to fly through it. What, on the contrary, appeared to him gloomy and forbidding was the whole business of hammering, braizing, the dull roar he knew so well, and from which he longed to escape. After all, whether he were absent a whole day, or only a few hours, Lebescam's rowing would be none the less severe. Then a brilliant idea occurred to him.

"As I am already on the road, why should I not take advantage of it and go as far as Nantes to buy Zénaïde's present?"

Behold him now in the ferry-boat, then at Basse Indre, and then at the station, transported by enchantment it seemed to him, so much did everything appear light and easy to accomplish on this particular morning. But at the station, there was no train before mid-day. How pass away the time? The waiting-room was cold and deserted. Outside whistled the wind. Jack went into a public-house more frequented by artisans than by peasants, although it stood quite in the country, which bore as a sign-board, these words painted in black on the rough-cast wall:

“HERE, IF YOU PLEASE!” the cry that echoes through the forge when the iron is hot, and the hammerers are called to strike. A lying sign like all signs, for forging was not the business carried on here. Although it was still early, there were groups around nearly all the tables lighted by little petroleum lamps, the unhealthy smoke of which combined with that of the pipes to thicken the atmosphere. “*Here, if you please*” sat drinking in the corners those who haunted the pot-houses on week days, during working hours; the refuse, the dregs of the shops, all who were wont to find the tools heavy, and a glass of spirits light. “*Here, if you please*” were only to be seen sordid countenances, the dirty smock of idleness stained with wine and mud, arms wearied by drunken slumbers, all the unpunctual ones, the idlers, the bad workmen for whom the tavern lies in wait in the neighbourhood of the factories, who are attracted by its treacherous windows where the rows of bottles lend colour and disguise to the poison of the alcohol. Suffocated by the smoke, bewildered by the confused hum, the apprentice hesitated about taking a seat on the benches beside the others, when he heard his name called from the back of the room:

“Hi! Aztec, here!”

“Hullo! why there’s Gascogne.”

Gascogne was one of the Indret workmen, who had been dismissed the night before for drunkenness. Near him, and at the same table, was seated a sailor or rather a cabin-boy of sixteen or seventeen, whose beardless but already degraded face, with its relaxed half open mouth, emerged from his great blue collar with easy effrontery. Jack sat down in this charming society.

“What! you’re in for a drinking bout, too, old fellow,” said Gascogne with the familiarity of companionship that

unites bad workmen, "Just the very thing! You'll take a glass with us!"

He accepted, and then ensued among them a contest of politeness over bottles of every colour. The younger fellow particularly took Jack's fancy. He wore his becoming costume with so killing an air of swagger! And then he had so much aplomb, so much calm audacity, fearing neither God nor the constable. Notwithstanding his age, he had already been twice round the world, and talked of Java and the Javanese women as if it were merely on the other side of the Loire. Ah! how willingly would the apprentice have exchanged his knitted waistcoat, his slop, his leathern apron for the sou'wester swaggeringly perched at the back of the boy's close cut hair, and the loose belt of a blue faded by sun and seawater! A real trade that, full of adventures, dangers and freedom. The sailor, however, grumbled:

"Too much broth, with too little meat," said he at every turn. Jack was delighted with the expression, and considered it exquisitely witty:

"Too much broth with too little meat! Oh! what rare fellows these sailors are."

"Just as it is at Indret," added Gascogne. "There's a hole for you!" And he poured forth imprecations against the manager and the overseers, a lot of good-for-nothings, who stood still with folded arms, while others broke their backs for them.

"The fact is that much could be said," observed Jack, whose mind suddenly reverted to the commonplace phrases of the singer Labassindre on the rights of the workman and the tyranny of capital. Old Jack's tongue was as nimble as his legs this morning. Little by little his eloquence silenced all the other talk of the tap-room. He was listened to. Around him they muttered: "He

is a sharp fellow, this lad, one can see he comes from Paris." All that he lacked to create a greater effect was a deep voice like Labassindre's, instead of that cockerel's hoarse note, that adult voice through which the shrillness of childhood jarred now and again with phrases of precocious gravity, and which at this moment seemed to come to him from afar off, as if he had sent his words several atmospheres above his head. Soon, what he said became so confused, so indistinct, even to himself, that he spoke, first without hearing himself, then felt a sensation as of flight through the air, and of rolling, as if he had been launched in pursuit of his ideas and words in the car of a balloon, the motion of which made him sick and altogether giddy.

A puff of fresh air on his face restored him to himself. He was seated on the bank of the Loire. How did he find himself beside this sailor who was moistening his temples? His eyes, opened with difficulty, blinked at the broad daylight; then he perceived in front of him, the smoke of the iron-works, and near at hand, a boatman standing up in his boat, putting up the sail, making ready to start.

"Well, do you feel a little better?" said the youthful sailor, wringing out his handkerchief.

"Why yes, all right," replied Jack, with chattering teeth and heavy head.

"Then let us get on board."

"On board?" said the apprentice, astounded.

"To be sure. We are going to Nantes. Don't you remember that you hired a boat from that boatman just now, in the tavern. Here comes Gascogne with the provisions."

"The provisions!"

"Here, old man, here's your change," said the smith,

who was laden with a great basket, out of which peeped the end of a loaf of bread and the necks of bottles. "Come on, boys! Off we go. The wind is fair. In an hour we shall be at Nantes, and then we can make a real bout of it."

Jack had just for a moment a gleam of perfectly clear comprehension of what he was about to do, into what an abyss he was about to fall. He would fain have jumped into the ferry-boat moored near by and have returned to Indret, but for this an effort of will was needful, an effort of which he was not capable.

"Come along!" cried the young seaman, "you are a little pale still, breakfast will set you up."

The apprentice resisted no longer, but embarked with the others. After all, three gold pieces remained to him, more than was necessary to buy himself some clothes, and a little present for Zénaïde. So his journey to Nantes would not be altogether lost. Besides, it was one of the symptoms of the condition in which he now found himself, to pass through the most contrary state of feeling, and from the deepest melancholy to the most inexplicable content.

Seated with the others in the bottom of the boat, he breakfasted gaily, his appetite sharpened by the keen and salt-laden breeze, which drove the boat before it, heeled her over on her side, like a bird skimming the water with one wing, while overhead was a true Breton sky. The cordage creaked, the sail filled in every part, and the two shores unwound with a lapping of waves; familiar riverside scenery, outlines of fishers, washerwomen and shepherds, whose sheep seemed from afar like great insects on the short turf. Jack saw all these things, and his over-excited imagination invested them with exaggerated beauty and poetry. There recurred to him

recollections of bye-gone readings, of adventures by sea, of expeditions in far-off lands which the neighbourhood of the sailor, the meetings with great vessels that the boat steered aside to avoid, brought to his mind. Why else, in this medley of memories, did an English vignette in an old Robinson Crusoe that he had had when quite little, obstinately present itself to his mind with its thumbbed and yellow page ; Robinson lying in a hammock, with a mug of gin in his hand, amongst drunken sailors and the remains of a rough feast, and beneath, this inscription, retained these ten years in his mind : "*And in one night's debauch, I forgot all my resolutions.*" Perhaps at this moment, empty bottles were rolling in the boat, among spilt wine, and men lying amid the remains of a meal. Jack knew nothing positively, but flights of gulls driven by the wind, and fluttering round the point of the sail increased the illusion of a long sea voyage, for his face was turned upwards and he no longer saw anything but the sky, fleeces of grey clouds succeeding each other perpetually above his head and flying with a fatiguing speed that began to make him giddy.

He changed his position, recalled to the realities of life by the songs of his two companions, who were shouting seafaring choruses : "*Et bitte et bosse !—et quelle noce !*" \* Ah ; if he could have done the same ; but he only knew a few nursery rhymes such as : *Mes souliers sont rouges* † and he would have been ashamed to display his ignorance. Then he became uneasy under a gaze steadily fixed upon his own. Standing upright in front of him, spitting from time to time into his hand, the better to hold the tiller, the skipper fascinated him with

\* And heave and haul—and here's a lark !

† "My shoes are red."

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his two clear grey eyes, which in his bronzed and weather-beaten face seemed to have lost their colour. Jack would have liked well enough to put a stop to this contemptuous glance, which said to him: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you young scamp!" but these old sea-dogs, accustomed to a constant look-out for squalls, to see them come running over the blue of the waves in quick shivering shadows, have eyes that nothing can divert. To lull this annoying surveillance, Jack tried to make the skipper drink. He held out a glass that trembled in his hand, and a bottle from which he persisted in attempting to pour wine that had already been drained to the very last drop: "Come, skipper, a drop of wine."

The skipper made signs that he was not thirsty.

"Leave that old Lascar alone," said the sailor-lad, in an undertone to his friend, "don't you remember that he didn't wish to bring us. It was his wife who persuaded him. He thought you had too much money; that it was not all right."

Ah! indeed! do you suppose Jack will let himself be treated as a thief. You are to know that he can have as much money as he wishes. He has only to write to—Happily, in the disorder of his ideas, he recollects that his mother has forbidden him to mention her name in connection with these hundred francs, and contents himself with asseverating that the money is really his, his savings, and that he is going to buy some clothes with it, and try to get a little present for Zé—Zé—Zénaïde.

He talked and talked, but no one listened to him. Gascogne and the sailor were quarrelling. One wished to get off at Châtenay, a large suburb of Nantes that extends its length along the edge of the water, dilapidated and gloomy, full of factories, its sheds alternating

with public-houses, or wretched gardens blackened by rain and smoke. The other wished to go on as far as Nantes ; and in the dispute, which grew warm, threats flew freely of : “ smashing faces with bottles, of ripping up stomachs with knives, or, merely, of cracking open skulls to see what was in them.”

The comical part of it was, that they exchanged these amenities quite close to each other, obliged to cling to the side of the boat to avoid falling ; for the breeze was strong, and the little boat furrowed the waves with her side. To execute their terrible threats, they must have had free hands and rather more space. But Jack did not see things thus, and distressed at the discord that had sprung up between his two comrades, tried to calm them and effect a reconciliation.

“ My friends, dear old friends, I implore you ! ”

There were tears in his voice, in his eyes, on his cheeks ; an amazing tenderness overpowered him, as if all other sensations had melted and dissolved in one great, immense desire to weep. Perhaps it was from seeing so much water around him. At last the quarrel calmed down, suddenly, just as it had arisen, Châtenay and its last house being left behind on the shore. They were entering Nantes. The skipper hauled down the sail and took to the oars, in order to steer more surely in the crowded harbour.

Jack wished to rise, to gain a better view ; but he was too giddy, and was quickly obliged to reseal himself. He again had, as in the morning, a feeling of immense height and of swinging in mid-air. Only this time he did not lose consciousness. Everything turned round with him. Old sculptured houses with stone balconies mingled with the masts of vessels, pursued them, swallowed them, then disappeared themselves, and were replaced by great

spread sails, black and smoking funnels, and shining red or brown hulls. In front of the vessels, beneath the bowsprit, slender figures, pale and draped, rose and dipped to the movement of the waves, and dripping with water, seemed to shed tears of weariness and fatigue. At least so Jack imagined. In the narrow spaces between these massive quays, under this low heavy sky that carried the glance all the further that it prevented it from rising, the vessels appeared to him so many prisoners, and the names on their sides seemed to him to cry aloud for sunshine, free space, and the golden roadsteads of transatlantic shores.

Then he bethought him of Mâdou, of his flights to the port of Marseilles, of his strange hiding-places at the bottom of holds, among coal, merchandise and baggage. But this idea, like the others, merely passed through his brain, and flitted away with the "Heave oh!" of the sailors hauling at the ropes, the creaking of the pulleys at the top of the yards, and the hammer blows in the dockyard.

Now, Jack is no longer in the boat. How did that happen? Where did he get out? There are such gaps as these in dreams; and Jack lives in a moving dream. He and his two companions are making their way along an interminable quay, by which runs a tramway encumbered with goods of all kinds in process of lading or unlading, making obstacles and gangways at every step. He stumbles into bales of cotton, slips upon heaps of grain, bumps against the corners of cases, and wherever he goes is greeted with the strong or sickly odours of spice, coffee, grain, or essences. He loses his comrades, finds them again, loses them again, and suddenly finds himself in the midst of a long dissertation on oleaginous grains with Brigadier Mangin, who gazes at him uneasily, and pulls his little fair moustache with a

puzzled air. For, strange to say, Jack can see himself in action ; he has become double. In him there is a Jack who is a sort of madman, who shouts, gesticulates, walks awry, says and does a thousand follies ; while another, a reasonable being, though dumb, gagged, impotent, is condemned to assist at the other's degradation without being able to do anything but look on and remember. This conscious, clear-sighted Jack, nevertheless slumbers occasionally, while the crazy one continues his antics, so that great blanks produce themselves in this eventful day, gaps, absences, voids that memory can not bridge over.

Imagine the confusion of the reasonable Jack at seeing the crazy Jack with a bran new sailor's scarf twisted round his smock, marching down the streets of Nantes, armed with a long pipe ! He would fain cry out to him : " You poor idiot, you don't look like a sailor. In vain have you a pipe, a belt, the sou'-wester of your sea-faring friend ; in vain do you strut along between your companions, roll your shoulders, and boisterously blunder out : ' Too much broth with too little meat, confound it all ! ' With your belt badly fastened, and placed too high up, and your simple face, you resemble at most a choir boy who has drunk the wine of the mass. Look ! the passers-by turn and laugh as you go by."

But unable to express anything, he can only think this inwardly, and must follow his uncomfortable companion, bumped and jolted at his every caprice and zig-zag step. He accompanies him to a great gilded coffee-house, adorned with mirrors, wherein the reflected images seem to fall forwards. The Jack who has still eyes to see, beholds reflected in front of him among the people entering, a mean and wretched-looking group, in the midst of which is crazy Jack, pale and dirty and stained by all the mud that has splashed up from his heavy uncertain

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footsteps. A waiter approaches the three ragamuffins. They are turned out; given back to the cold of the street. Now they wander about the town.

What a town! How large it is! Quays, quays for ever, lined with old-fashioned houses with iron balconies. One bridge is passed, then another, and another. What endless bridges, what endless rivers cross and mingle with each other, giving a wearisome motion as of flow and ebb to the dizzy visions of this aimless walk! It becomes at last so utterly melancholy to wander thus, that Jack finds himself crying hot tears, on a little flight of steps, narrow and slippery, leading down to the black waters of a canal which cover its lowest steps. It is thick dappled water, without current or movement, heavy with dye, and lapping beneath the paddle-floats of a great steamer not far off. Gascogne and the sailor are playing at *galoche*\* on the bank. Jack feels heart-broken; he knows not why. He is utterly weary; and besides, feels very sick! "Suppose I drown myself?" He descends one step, then another. Now he is on a level with the water. The idea that he is about to die, makes him very sorry for himself:

"Good-bye, comrades!" he says, sobbing. But his friends are so much taken up with their game, that they do not hear him.

"Good-bye, my poor friends; you won't see me any more. I am going to die!"

The poor friends, still deaf to his words, are discussing a doubtful throw. How sad, though, to die in this way, without saying good-bye to anyone; without a helping hand stretched out to catch one back from the abyss. It is a fact, that they would absolutely leave him to drown himself; monsters that they are. There they are above, shout-

\* Pitch and toss.

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ing and threatening each other—just as they were this morning. Again they are talking of ripping each other up, of splitting each other's heads open. A crowd collects round them. The police arrive ; Jack, in alarm, scrambles up the steps, and takes to his heels. Now he is alongside a great timber-yard. Some one passes close to him, running and staggering. It is the sailor, with disordered clothes, without hat or tie ; his great collar torn at the throat.

“And Gascogne?”

“In the canal. I sent him rolling in with a butt of my head. There!”

And away goes the sailor in all haste, for he has the police after him. Jack's ideas have become so completely gloomy, that it seems almost natural to him that the sailor lad should have drowned Gascogne ; as if murder were the last rung of the dismal ladder on which he has placed his foot, and which descends into utter darkness. Nevertheless, he would retrace his steps to get news of the poor wretch. All at once, some one calls him :

“Hi, Aztec!”

It was Gascogne, without either hat or cravat, breathless and desperate.

“He's got what he deserved your sailor. A kick, and bang into the canal he went ! The police is at my heels. I must be off ; good-night !”

Which of the two had been killed ? Which was the assassin ?

Jack makes no endeavour to understand ; all is dark to him. And lo ! I know not how it happened, behold them again all three re-united in a public-house, where they sit down to a huge jorum of onion soup, into which several bottles of wine are emptied. This singular beverage is called “making chabrol.” Chabrol is made ; made many times apparently, in various taverns ; for bars and

unsteady tables succeed one another in that giddy dream, wherein the Jack who could reason has almost given up following the other. Henceforward it is nothing but a medley of wet pavements, dark cellars, little pointed doorways above which flare expressive sign-boards of casks, foaming glasses and bunches of grapes. All this gradually fades into dusk, until the moment when the night of the slums lights up ; when candles stuck in the necks of bottles throw their gleam upon a hideous vision of negresses encircled with pink gauze, and of sailors dancing jigs, to the music of harpists arrayed in frock-coats. Here Jack, excited by the music, commits a thousand absurdities. Now he mounts upon a table, endeavours to execute a superannuated dance that an old dancing-master of his mother's taught him when a child :

A la Monaco

*L'on chasse et l'on déchasse.**

And he does glide with a vengeance, forwards and backwards, until the table turns over, and he rolls with it, amid a tremendous tumult of cries, of broken glasses and crockery. Sunk down on a bench in the middle of an unfamiliar deserted square, with a church standing out on it, he has still the measure of his dance in his head : "*A la Monaco, l'on chasse et l'on déchasse.*" It is all that remains of the day's work in his empty head, empty as his pocket. The sailor?—gone. Gascogne?—disappeared. He is alone at that hour of dusk when solitude is most felt in all its bitterness. The yellow gas-lights appear one by one, and are reflected both in the river and the gutters. The shades of night float all

* In the Monaco
One glides and glides back.

around like a veil of fine ashes over a still vaguely lingering fire. In this shadow the massive contours of the church disappear little by little. The houses no longer own roofs; the vessels have no topsails. Life descends altogether to the level of the ground; to the height of the gleams that fall from an occasional shop window.

After shouts, cries, tears, despair, immense joy, Jack has now reached terror. On the dismal page of the sad book he has been perusing all day, "Nought" is written. On this one: "Nought and Night." He no longer moves, has not even power to escape from the loneliness, the desolation that appals him; and would remain there, stretched out upon the bench, after the fashion of all such, in a state of annihilation that is not sleep, if a well-known cry—a cry which brings deliverance and salvation—had not aroused him from his stupor.

"Hats! hats! hats!"

He called: "Bélisaire!"

It is Bélisaire. Jack tries to raise himself, and explain that he has had a "dri—dri—drinking bout," but he cannot tell whether he has succeeded. Anyhow, he leans upon the hawker, whose step is in accordance at least with his own; just as halting, just as laborious, but sustained at least by a vigorous will. Bélisaire leads him away, gently scolding. Where are they? Where are they going? Here are the quays lighted but deserted—a railway station. Happy thought—a bench to lie on.

What now? What is the matter? What do they want with him? He is aroused, shaken, jostled. Men talk to him loudly. His hands are seized by hands of iron; his wrists tied with cords. And he has not even the courage to resist, for now sleep overpowers all other sensations. He sleeps—in something that resembles a railway carriage. He sleeps after that in a boat, where it

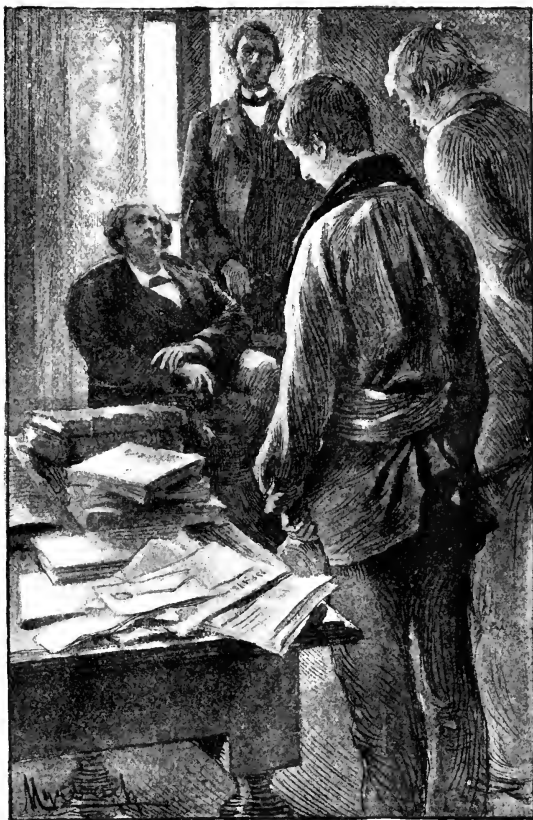
is very cold, but where he snores as before, lying in the bottom, incapable of movement. Then he is wakened again, carried, pulled, pushed. And now what is his relief, after all these bewildered and somnambulic peregrinations, to stretch himself at last upon the straw where he has rolled, and sleep his fill, protected from light and noise by a solid door, and two huge well drawn creaking bolts.





VI.

BAD NEWS.



The manager had the culprits summoned to his study.



IN the morning, a tremendous noise overhead awoke Jack with a start.

What a dismal affair is the awakening after drunkenness : the consuming thirst, the trembling, the aching of the weary limbs—feeling as if compressed in heavy armour that hurts everywhere ; then the shame, the unutterable anguish of the human being who, finding he has returned

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to the state of a brute, is so disgusted at his degradation, that he cannot endure the thought of going on living! Jack experienced all this on opening his eyes, even before he had regained possession of his memory, as if remorse had haunted him even in his sleep.

It was still too dark to distinguish objects. Yet he knew he was not in his garret. He could not see the gleam of his skylight filled with its blue bit of sky; for the pale dawn looked in upon him from two high windows, which cut up the light into a number of white patches upon the walls. Where was he? In a corner not far from his pallet-bed he saw a set of pulleys and heavy weights with cords mingled and crossed. All at once the alarming noise that had just awakened him began again. It sounded like the creaking rattle of a chain unwinding; then the deep stroke of a great clock. He knew that clock well. For the last two years it was that which had regulated the employment of his time, coming to him through the winter blast, the summer heat, as he lay falling asleep at night in his little apprentice's room, and knocking in the morning with its heavy notes against the dewy pane of his skylight, saying: "Get up. Get up." He was at Indret then. Yes; but usually this voice of time came from further off, from higher up. His head must indeed be terribly weary for these notes to resound in it so loudly, with such persistent vibrations. Unless, indeed, he were in the clock tower itself, in that loftily perched room called at Indret "the seclusion," where refractory apprentices were shut up. This is indeed where he was. Why? What had he done?

Then the feeble gleam of daylight gliding little by little into the place showed him its aspect, and penetrated also into his memory, lighting up every corner of it one after the other. He tried to reconstruct the employment

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of yesterday ; and all that he could recall filled him with horror. Ah ! if only he could have ceased to remember !

But with implacable cruelty his second Jack, now wholly awake, recalled to him all the follies that he had done or said during that day. Bit by bit, all emerged from the confusion of dreamland. *He* had forgotten nothing, and what is more gave proofs in support of his statements : a sailor's hat that had lost its ribbon, a blue scarf, remains of pipes and tobacco in his pockets, with a little very small change. At each fresh revelation, Jack blushed even in the dark, exclamations of anger and disgust escaped him, despairing gestures of pride brought face to face with irreparable shame. One of these exclamations louder than the rest was answered by a groan.

He was not alone ! Some one was with him, a shadow seated over there on the stone seat of one of the deep old-fashioned embrasures made in the thickness of the walls.

"Who is that ?" Jack asked himself, uneasily ; and he watched the shadow, standing out sharply on the white-washed wall, grotesque, motionless, with irregular and protruding angles, like some beast sunk down to rest. There could exist only one being in the world deformed enough to own such a reflection—Bélisaire. But what could Bélisaire be doing here ? Jack had nevertheless a vague recollection that the hawker had assisted him. His stiffness brought back to his mind a struggle in a railway station, amidst a fluttering swarm of hats and caps dispersed by a strong wind. All this, however, was a confused, hesitating memory, as if half-buried in dregs.

"Is that you, Bélisaire ?"

"Oh, yes ; it is I," answered the hawker in a hoarse voice, and an accent of despair.

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"But what in heaven's name have we done, that we should be shut up here like two malefactors?"

"What others may have done, I don't know, and have nothing to do with. But I know very well that for my part, I have done no wrong to anyone, and that it is a wicked thing to have put my hats into such a state."

He stopped a moment, still shaken by his terrible battle, and looked at his disaster as it lay before him in the darkness; all his cargo trampled under foot, crumpled, crushed and destroyed. This dreadful spectacle, which had been constantly before his eyes ever since the previous evening, prevented him from sleeping or from feeling the weariness of his limbs loaded with chains and cords, or even the habitual torture of his shoes, to which his wandering destiny and his deformity condemned him.

"Do you think they will pay me for my hats? Tell me. For after all, I had nothing to do with what has happened. You will tell them at any rate, that it was not I who helped you to do this thing."

"What thing! What have I done?" asked Jack, boldly; but he bethought him that among the many follies which were not all present to his mind, he might have committed one more serious than the rest, and he questioned Bélisaire this time more timidly.

"Do tell me, what am I accused of?"

"They say—but why do you make me tell you? You must know very well what they say."

"Indeed, I swear I don't."

"Well, then, they say it is you who have stolen——"

"Stolen! stolen what?"

"Zénaïde's dower."

The apprentice, completely sobered, gave a cry of indignation and grief.

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“It is infamous! You don’t believe it, Bélisaire?”

Bélisaire made no reply. It was a perfect certainty to the whole world of Indret that Jack was guilty, and the constables who had arrested them the previous evening, in talking the affair over before the hawker, had convinced him also. All the appearances were against the apprentice. At the first rumour spread in the shops of the theft committed at the Roudics’, Jack, who had in point of fact missed the morning muster, was suspected. Ah? the Nantais had made a good calculation in drawing him away from the workshops. From the public-house in the main street of Indret, to the Bourse station at Nantes, where the culprit and his accomplice had been arrested at the moment they were about to take their tickets to escape no one knew whither, the trace of his theft continuously followed the steps of the apprentice, in the shape of the gold spent and squandered all along his course—those gold pieces changed on every occasion. And what a convincing proof was the whole day’s debauch, the drunkenness that so often follows crime like a halting and disguised remorse!

No one, therefore, doubted his guilt. Only one point remained inexplicable: the complete disappearance of the six thousand francs, of which not a trace could be found, either in the pockets of Bélisaire which contained only a few francs, the produce of his daily sale, or in those of the apprentice, in which only a few strange and rusty coppers remained, the change found in sea-faring public-houses, where sailors from all parts of the world are wont to drink. Evidently it could not be in the low pot-houses of the port that they could, even in ten hours, have got rid of all the money missing from Zénaïde’s casket. The largest part must still be hidden somewhere.

Where? That is what must be found out.

Therefore, as soon as morning appeared, the manager had the culprits summoned to his study, two unmistakable criminals, covered with mud, pale, wan, torn and shivering. About Jack, with the grace of youth, his delicate and intelligent little face, there was yet, notwithstanding the state of his costume and his hideous blue belt, something interesting and distinguished. But Bélisaire, who was always frightful, and now still more so from the bruises received in the brawl and the marks of resistance written in scars and rends all over his face and clothes, was rendered more appalling than ever by the expression of atrocious suffering which his swelled feet, compressed all night long in their boots, depicted upon his grimy and contorted face blotched with red ; an expression that closed his thick mouth, and imprinted on it such a lamentable, determined dumbness as may be observed on the face of a seal. On seeing them side by side, the general opinion was confirmed, which would have it that the apprentice, a gentle and timid child, had been merely the instrument of some wretch whose counsels had led to his ruin.

As he crossed the manager's ante-room, Jack beheld several faces that had upon him the effect of apparitions, as if the imaginings of a frightful night-mare had taken solid form and had reared themselves before him. The assurance of innocence which still allowed him to hold his head high before the accusation of the crime, at this moment deserted him. The boatman who had taken him, the innkeepers of Indret, of Basse Indre, even of Nantes, recalled to him every stage of yesterday's work. He lived it all over again in a minute with all its grotesque and painful recollections, passed through all the pallors of his drunkenness, all the burning blushes of his shame.

When he entered the manager's office he was humble, tearful, ready to sink down and crave for pardon.

There was no one there but the manager, seated before the window in his great office chair, and old Roudic standing near him, his little blue woollen cap in his hand. The two superintendents who had brought the criminals remained in the background in front of the door, keeping an eye on the hawker, as on a dangerous character capable of any crime. Jack on seeing the foreman, instinctively moved towards him, his hand outstretched, as to a friend, but old Roudic's face wore an air of severity, above all of sadness, that kept him at a distance during the whole of the interrogatory.

"Listen to me, Jack," said the manager. "Out of regard for your youth, for your parents, for the good character you have hitherto borne, and also I must add, for the honour of this establishment, I have obtained leave that instead of being taken to Nantes, you should be left here, and a few days should intervene before the affair is brought into court. So, at this moment, all that passes is strictly between you, Roudic and myself; and it rests with yourself that the affair should go no further. You are only asked to give up what remains—"

"But, sir."

"Do not interrupt me. You can explain presently—to give up what remains of the six thousand stolen francs, for you cannot possibly have spent six thousand francs in one day; is that not so? Well, then, give us what you have left, and I will content myself with merely sending you home to your parents."

"Beg pardon," said Bélisaire timidly advancing his great head with an affable smile, composed of as many little wrinkles as there are little wavelets on the Loire in an east wind. "Beg pardon."

At the contemptuous and icy glance thrown towards him by the manager he stopped, embarrassed and scratched his head.

“What have you to say?”

“Beg pardon! As I see the affair of the theft is all settled, I would like, if you are kind enough, to talk a little about my hats.”

“Hold your tongue, you rogue. I don’t understand how you can have the impudence to say a word. As if we did not know that the real culprit is you, notwithstanding your smooth manners, and that this child would never, without your evil advice, have committed such an action.”

“Oh!” gasped the unfortunate Bélisaire, turning towards the apprentice as if to implore his testimony. Jack would have protested. Old Roudic did not give him time.

“You are right, sir. It is bad company that has ruined him. Before that, there was never a more honest, steady apprentice. My wife and daughter—every one at home—was fond of him. We had complete confidence in him. It is meeting this vagabond that has done it, there can’t be a doubt.”

Bélisaire hearing himself thus treated, looked so despairing, so scared, that Jack, forgetting for the moment the accusation weighing upon himself, bravely undertook the defence of his friend.

“I swear to you, Monsieur Roudic, that this poor fellow had nothing to do with all this. When they arrested us yesterday, he had just met me wandering about the streets of Nantes, and as I was not in a state to take care of myself, he was going to bring me back to Indret.”

“You did the business all alone, then?” asked the manager with an air of incredulity.

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"But I have done nothing, sir. I have not stolen. I am not a thief."

"Take care, boy ; you are making a bad start. It is only by a full confession and the restitution of the money that you can merit our indulgence. As to your guilt, it is but too plain. Do not try to deny it. Come now, unhappy child, you were alone in the house, with the two Roudic women that night. Before going to bed, Zénaïde opened her cupboard and showed you the place where she hid her casket. Is that true? Then, in the middle of the night, she heard your ladder move, and she spoke to you. Naturally, you made no reply ; but she is quite sure it was you, since there was no one but you in the house."

Jack, dumbfounded, had nevertheless strength enough to reply :

"It was not I. I have stolen nothing."

"Really? And how about the money squandered all along your road?"

He was about to say : "My mother sent it to me," but he called to mind the wish she had expressed : "If you are asked, where you got the hundred francs, say they are your savings." And now, at this critical moment, with the blind faith, the veneration he retained for every command of his mother's, he replied : "They were my savings."

She might have ordered him to say : "It was I who stole," and without hesitation, he would have owned himself guilty. Such was the nature of the child.

"How can you expect us to believe that with your pay of fivepence a day, you can have put aside the two or three hundred francs, that, at the rate you were going on, you must have spent in the course of the day? Try no more of these tricks. You would do much better to ask the forgiveness of these worthy people, on whom you

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have inflicted such a terrible blow, and repair as quickly as possible the wrong you have done them."

Then old Roudic came up to Jack, and laid his hand on his shoulder :

" Jack—my little lad, tell us where the money is ? Just think that it is Zénaïde's fortune, that I have worked hard for twenty years of my life, that I have denied myself everything to economize such a sum. My consolation was, that one day, my child's happiness would be the reward of my fatigue and privations. I am quite sure that when you did this thing you did not think of all this, or you would not have done it, for I know you, you are not really wicked. No, it was a moment of madness. Your head was turned by the sight of so much money, ready there, to your hand. But now you have had time to think, and it can only be the shame of confessing that holds you back. Come, Jack, a moment's courage ! Remember that I am old, that by no possible means can I regain all those silver pieces, and that my poor Zénaïde— Come, tell me where the money is, my boy."

Flushed and agitated, the worthy fellow wiped his face after this burst of eloquence. Only a very hardened culprit, indeed, could resist so touching an entreaty. Bélisaire, himself, was so much moved by it that he forgot his own catastrophe, and, while Roudic was speaking, made a thousand little signs to the apprentice, which he believed to be mysterious, but which his features translated with the most comical exaggeration : " Come, Jack, give this poor man back his money." For right well did the hawker understand the sacrifices of the father, his own life being one of perpetual self-denial for his own belongings.

Alas ! if Jack had but had this money, how joyfully would he have poured it into the hands of father Roudic,

whose despair cut him to the heart ! But he had not got it, and could only say : " I have not robbed you, Monsieur Roudic ; I swear I have taken nothing."

The manager, out of all patience, rose from his chair.

" Enough. To resist such words as those you have been just listening to, you must have the soul of a scoundrel ; and if they will not draw the truth from you, all that we can say to you will have no effect. You will be taken upstairs again. I give you till this evening to reflect. If then, you have not made up your mind to make the called-for restitution, I shall abandon you to the course of justice : it will know how to make you speak."

At this point, one of the superintendents, a quondam constable, a shrewd and trustworthy man, approached his chief, and said to him in a low tone :

" I believe, sir, that if you are to get anything out of the child, you must separate him from the other. I saw at one moment he was going to tell everything, and the hawker prevented him by making him signs all the time."

" You are right. They must be kept apart."

They were accordingly separated, and Jack was taken back alone to the room in the clock tower. As he went out he caught sight of the terrified and bewildered face of Bélisaire being led away handcuffed ; and the thought of this poor devil, who was as unhappy as himself, and far less guilty, added to his tortures.

How long the day seemed to him.

He tried at first to sleep, burying his head in the straw to escape from the despair that overwhelmed him. But the idea that every one believed him guilty, that he had himself given rise to all this suspicion by his disgraceful conduct of the day before, shook him at every moment

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with violent starts. How could he prove his innocence? By showing his mother's letter and proving that the squandered money came from her. But supposing d'Argenton should hear of it! The lack of perspective which puts small reasons before great ones in youthful brains, caused him at once to abandon this means of salvation. He pictured a dreadful scene at Les Aulnettes, and poor Charlotte in tears.

But then, by what means could he justify himself? And while he struggled with these difficulties of conscience, stretched upon his heap of straw, still stiff from yesterday's drunkenness, the sounds of work in full swing mounted in the air around him, the clock struck over his head and the heavy tones sounded like the slow inexorable footsteps of an avenger.

Two o'clock. Four o'clock. The return of the workmen, their exit. Evening will soon close in, and he has only till evening to prove his innocence. If the money is not forthcoming, to prison he must go! Jack wished he were there already. It seemed to him that he would be better off shut up, immured in a dungeon so dark and so deep that no one would seek it out to reclaim him. One might think he had a presentiment of the dreadful torture yet in store for him. Suddenly he hears the ladder-like stairs leading to the clock room creak. Some one pants, sighs, blows a nose outside the door, on which finally sounds a timid knock, such as might be struck by great fingers afraid of making too much noise. Then the key turned in the lock, and Zénaïde entered quickly:

"It is I. Ouf! it is high up, here!"

She said this with an attempt at gracious playfulness; but she had cried so much—her locks, usually so smooth, were so much ruffled under her cap—her eyes were so red and swelled, that this fictitious gaiety overlying the traces

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of her grief, only brought them into stronger relief. The poor girl smiled at Jack, who gazed at her sadly :

“I am ugly, eh?—a horror. I know I never was pretty. I make faces at myself when I look in the glass. I have a big waist, no figure, and with that a great nose and small eyes. It won’t be by crying that I shall make my eyes any bigger, and for all that, since yesterday I have done nothing else, a perfect Magdalen. And to think of my dear little Mangin, who is such a good-looking fellow ! It needed a dower like mine to make him overlook all my defects. The jealous girls told me right out : ‘It is for your money that he asks your hand.’ As if I did not know it. Well, yes ! it was my money that pleased him, it was my money he wanted, but I loved him, and I thought : ‘When I am his wife I will force him to love me in return.’ But now you understand, my little Jack, it is not at all the same thing. It is not for the sake of the thousand francs left in my casket, that anyone would encumber himself with a creature as ugly as I am. Indeed at the time when father would only give four thousand francs, Monsieur Mangin said he preferred at that price remaining a bachelor. I fancy I can see him twirl his little moustache when he comes in this evening and makes me a pretty farewell speech. Never fear, though, I will spare him that trouble ; I will be beforehand with him, and give him back his promise. Only, only, before giving up my happiness altogether, I thought I would come and see you and talk a little with you, Jack.”

Jack hung his head, and cried. Young as he was he understood what a humiliation of her whole woman’s nature there was, in the naïve confession Zénaïde had made of her ugliness. And besides the valiant virtue of the brave girl was touching ; and her confidence in the

power of her love, in her qualities as a housewife, to win to herself after marriage, this dainty husband now to be bought with gold.

Seeing Jack cry, she was seized with joy.

“Ah, I told them, I did, that he was not so wicked, and that I had only to show him my great ugly face so reddened by crying since yesterday, to touch his heart and make him say ‘All the same, I was wrong to give so much pain to this poor Zénaïde, whom I saw so happy at getting married that she was dancing with joy before her cupboard.’ It is true that yesterday morning when I took up my casket and found it no heavier than a handful of snow, I thought that my heart had been torn out of my bosom, for I felt here a great void which has lasted ever since. Come Jack, my friend, you are going to give me back my dower, are you not?”

“But I have not got it, Zénaïde—I swear it.”

“No, don’t say that to me. You are not afraid of me, are you? I don’t make you any reproaches. Only tell me where my money is? Some of it must be missing, I know very well, but what does that matter? We know what young people are, they must amuse themselves. Ah! Ah! You made papa Roudic’s crown pieces fly didn’t you? So much the better? But tell me, where have you put the rest?”

“For pity’s sake, Zénaïde, listen to me. I have not robbed you. It is a mistake. It is not I. Oh! it is horrible that everyone should believe me guilty.”

She continued, without listening to him:

“But you understand, don’t you, that he won’t have anything more to say to me—that all thought of marriage is over for poor Zénaïde? Jack, my friend, don’t do me such an injustice. You will surely one day repent of it. In the name of your mother, whom you love so dearly, in

the name of that little friend of your's at home, of whom you have talked to me so often,—who knows? perhaps later on she may be your bride, for these friendships between children often lead further than is expected,—well! it is in her name I ask you this thing. Oh, good heavens, you still say 'no.' How must I implore you then? See! on both knees and with clasped hands, as if to Saint Anne."

Kneeling by the stone on which the apprentice was sitting, she began to cry again, with the suffocations, the choking—all the resistance, in short, that robust natures, closed in general, oppose to all exterior manifestations. Then despair resembles an explosion risen from the depths, it is as alarming and burning as a stream of lava, and spreads itself with unsuspected force. In the prostration of her whole person, as she knelt, sunk in the folds of her rustic dress, with her white coif bent low in an attitude of fervent supplication, Zénaïde was indeed the very personification of the profound despair, the hopelessly mournful prayer, which, on week days, in deserted village churches, is so often seen in Brittany.

Jack, as heartbroken as herself, tried to take her hand, with the new and heavy silver engagement ring embedded in the fat finger; he tried once more to defend himself, to justify himself.

Suddenly she rose with a bound:

"There, then! you will be punished! No one will ever love you in life, because you are a wicked heartless creature."

She left him and ran downstairs, never stopping till she reached the manager's study, who was waiting for her, alone with her father.

"Well?"

She made no reply, contented herself with a shake of

the head, all speech being still submerged in the passion of tears which choked her utterance.

“Come, my child, don’t give way to despair. Before we turn to the law which, after all, thinks more of punishing the guilty than of repairing the harm they have done, one resource remains to us. Roudic tells me that the mother of this young villain is married to a wealthy man. We will write to them. If they are worthy people, as I am told, your dower is not lost yet.”

He took a sheet of paper and wrote, reading aloud as he went on :

“Madame, your son has committed a theft of six thousand francs, all the savings of the honest and hard-working family with whom he lived. I have not yet handed over the thief to justice, in the hope that he might give back a part at least of the stolen money : but I begin to think he has either squandered or lost the whole of it, in the day’s orgy which followed the crime. This being the state of affairs, recourse to the law is inevitable, unless you are disposed to indemnify the Roudic family for the sum taken from them. I will await your decision before taking further steps ; but I can only wait three days, for I have already made a long delay. If I have no reply by Sunday, on Monday morning the culprit will be given up to justice.

“THE MANAGER.”

And he signed his name.

“Poor things ! it is terrible,” said old Roudic, who, amid his own grief, yet found time to pity that of others. Zénaïde raised her head with a savage air :

“Why terrible ? The child has taken my dower. The parents must give it back to me.”

Oh ! the pitiless cruelty of love and youth ! She never

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thought for a moment of the despair of the mother learning the disgrace of her son. Old Roudic, on the contrary, was softened by the thought that it would have killed him to receive a similar piece of news.

So, though his affection for Zénaïde was deep-seated, he retained a kind of vague hope that things would turn out differently, that the apprentice would restore the money of his own accord, that perhaps this cruel letter would be lost on the road, would not reach its destination. The little sheet of paper, that is to travel so far, mixed with so many others, is so fragile a thing to trust to all the chance accidents of a journey !

Yes, it is light and fragile, is a letter, and often gets lost. But the one the manager had just written, and sealed at the flame of a candle, that he has had posted along with a bundle of business letters, ran but little risk of being lost. The Breton postman will grope for it in the dark, and take it out of the tin post box, throw it into the depths of his leathern bag, dawdle with it in some public house by the roadside, but he will be sure not to forget it. It will pass the Loire, without any breeze from land or sea having power to carry it off. At the railway the hurried clerks will enclose it in the carelessly fastened canvas sack, which, worn by long use, is thrown into the train as it flies by ; it will not be lost.

It will be buried among a heap of other and bigger letters, will roll, slide, jump at the motion of the van that a stray spark would suffice to set on fire ; then it will arrive in Paris, and from thence it will pass through all kinds of gratings and sortings ; but it will neither be burnt, nor stolen, nor lost, nor torn, it will go straight to its destination, more surely than any other. And why ? Because it carries bad news. Letters of this sort have charmed lives ; nothing ever befalls them.

The proof is, that this one, after having crossed the great country of France, and travelled over the little lane we know so well, mounted up the red hill side of Etiolles, in the tin box of Casimir the rural postman. D'Argenton detests old Casimir because he is lazy, thinks Les Aulnettes very far off, and often confides the letters and papers to his wife, who cannot read, and always misdelivers something on the road. Yet another chance for the bad news to go astray. But no ; precisely on that day, Casimir does the duty himself, and here he is ringing at the door garlanded with the reddening leaves of the Virginian creeper, above which the inscription in gilded letters of *Parva domus, magna quies* grows every day a little fainter, eaten away by sun and rain.

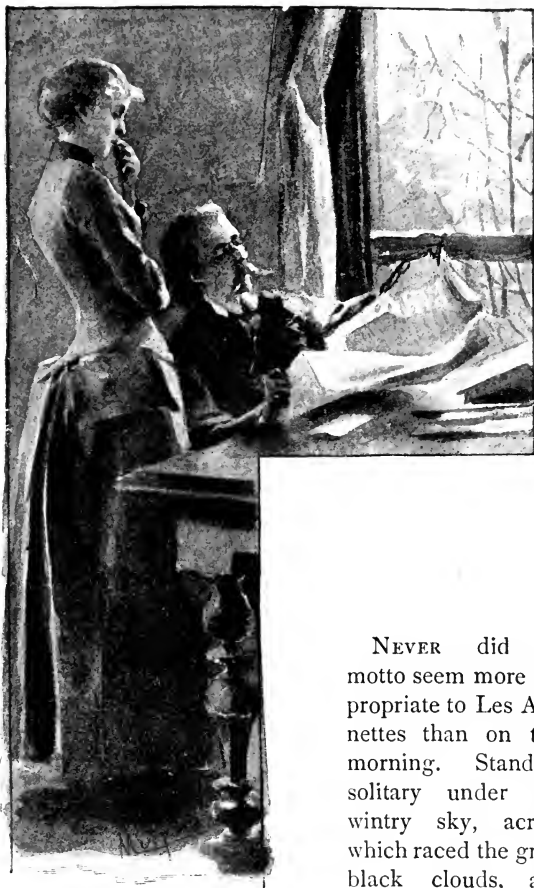


VII.

A CONVICT FOR METTRAY.



He saw Charlotte leaning on the arm of a tall, slight man.



NEVER did its motto seem more appropriate to Les Aulnettes than on this morning. Standing solitary under the wintry sky, across which raced the great black clouds, and looking smaller from the leafless aspect of the trees, the little house, hermetically shut against the damp of both garden and roadside, participated in the gloomy silence of the yet slumber-

ing earth, and the air still destitute of birds. A few crows picking up seeds in the neighbouring fields, alone broke the monotony of the dismal landscape, by the flight of their black wings almost level with the ground.

Charlotte was cutting off the withered grapes from the wall of the turreted room, the poet was at work and Doctor Hirsch asleep, when the arrival of the postman—the sole diversion of these voluntary exiles—united their scattered *ennui* in one group.

“Ah! a letter from Indret!” exclaimed d’Argenton, and maliciously he began to read the newspaper under the anxious gaze of Charlotte, keeping the letter by his side without touching it, like a dog watching a bone he will not allow to be touched. “Ah! What’s his name’s book has just been published. What a lot he knocks off, that fellow! And here are lines of Victor Hugo’s, ever inexhaustible!”

And why this cruel slowness in unfolding his newspaper?

Because Charlotte is there, behind him, impatient and flushed with pleasure; because each time a letter comes from Indret, the mother reasserts herself, and this wretched egotist cannot forgive her for not being exclusively and entirely occupied about him.

This is the reason why he sent the child so far, far away.

But a mother’s heart, even this one’s, is of such a nature that the further away her child is, the more she loves it, as though she would by the strength of her affection lessen space and draw hearts closer.

Since Jack’s departure, his mother, tortured by remorse, adored him in the same weak manner in which she had abandoned him. She avoided mentioning him, so as not to irritate the poet; but he was never out of her thoughts.



The poet guessed it. His hatred for the child increased thereby, and at Roudic's first letters complaining about the apprentice he gave way to disdainful satisfaction.

"You see ! We shall not even be able to make a workman of him."

This, however, was not sufficient for him. He would have liked to humiliate and lower Jack still more. This time his pleasure was to be complete. At the very first words he read of the Indret letter,—for he had at last made up his mind to open it—his face paled with emotion, and his eyes flashed with cruel triumph.

"I was certain of it !"

Then, immediately, seeing the call made on them to reimburse the money, he foresaw a lot of disagreeable complications, and with a heartrent air, he handed the letter to Charlotte.

What a terrible blow after so many others ! Wounded in her mother's pride, wounded in her tenderness, the poor woman was still more cruelly struck by the reproaches of her own conscience.

"It is your fault," cried the shrill voice which masters all the sophistry and all the reasoning in the world. "It is your fault. Why did you abandon him ?"

Now, he must be saved at any cost. But how ? Where would she find the money ? She no longer possessed anything. The sale of furniture, the temporary home filled with trumpery knick-knacks, had produced some few thousand francs, quickly spent. "*Bon Ami*" on leaving, had wished to give her a present, a souvenir ; but she had obstinately refused to accept it, from a feeling of dignity for d'Argenton. She had therefore nothing left. A few jewels only, that would not make up a quarter of the requisite sum. As for asking the poet, the thought never crossed her mind. She knew him too well. First

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he hated the child, and then he was avaricious. The Auvergnat nature cropped up in his petty meanness, love of hoarding, and peasant-like respect for the money placed at his notary's. Moreover he was not rich, Les Aulnettes was expensive, a heavy tax on his budget; it was out of economy that he was spending the winter there, notwithstanding the isolation and dullness, in the hope of thus making up for the summer squandering, the continual going to and fro of guests who kept up around his literary anxieties, an "intellectual circle," dearly bought.

Oh no! she had not thought of him. He, however, fancied she might, and already assumed the icy countenance, the face of a man who foresaw the request of a loan.

"I always said that child had bad instincts," he said, after giving her time to finish the letter.

She did not answer, perhaps even she did not hear, absorbed as she was with the idea "before three days are over I must find that money, or my child will be sent to prison."

He continued :

"What a disgrace for me in face of my friends, to have got them to recommend such a vile creature ! It will be a lesson to me ! A nice business indeed !"

The mother blushed.

"I must have that money before three days, that my child may not go to prison."

He watched her, guessed her thoughts ; and prudently, to avoid any request on her part, determined to forestall it.

"And to think that there is no way of avoiding this disgrace, of saving this unhappy wretch from being condemned. We are not rich enough."

"Oh ! if you chose," said she drooping her head.

He thought the request for money was coming, and her persistency threw him into a rage.

“Ay, of course! if I chose! I expected that word. As if you did not know better than anyone, what is spent here, the wasteful extravagance that surrounds me. Is it not sufficient for me to have had this wicked rascal living upon me for two years? Must I now pay his thefts? Six thousand francs! Where do you suppose I can find them?”

“Oh, I understand quite well. I had not thought of you.”

“Not thought of me? Who, then, had you thought of?”

Abashed, with hanging head, she named the man she had lived with so long, the *Bon Ami* of Jack, whom she called an *old friend*. Tremblingly she pronounced his name, expecting an explosion of jealousy from the poet at her past life, so imprudently recalled. Well no! On hearing *Bon Ami* mentioned d'Argenton merely blushed a little—he, too, had thought of him.

After all, Ida's former protector, like the child, formed part of Charlotte's past, of that mysterious past about which he proudly forebore to question her, which he even feigned to ignore, like those historians of the Restoration, who suppress all mention of the Republic and Bonaparte's reign, skipping them over in their books as though they had never existed. He thought to himself: “It was before my time. Let them settle it together,” delighted to be rid of it all so easily; but he would not allow her to guess how reassured he felt, and on the contrary assumed an attitude of offended dignity:

“My pride has already made so many sacrifices to my love, that it can easily make another.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you! How good you are!”

And they began talking in a low tone about the loan,

on account of Doctor Hirsch whose slipshod steps could now be heard dragging idly about the house.

A curious conversation indeed, carried on in monosyllables, short words hardly bearing on the subject—he affecting a great repugnance; she a delicate conciseness. They spoke of *some one*. *Some one* would certainly not refuse. *Some one* had given proof of that by the offer that had formerly been declined. Unfortunately *some one* inhabited Touraine, what could be done? A letter would take two days, as much for an answer. Then suddenly:

“If I went,” suggested Charlotte, frightened at her own audacity. He quietly replied:

“Very well. Let us go.”

“What! you will kindly accompany me to Tours, and to Indret also, then—for it is on the same road, and we could take the money there at once!”

“To Indret also.”

“How kind you are, how kind you are!” repeated the poor deluded creature, as she kissed his hands. In truth, he did not care to let her go alone to Tours. Without knowing all her history, he was aware that she had lived and been happy there. And suppose she did not return! She was so weak, so inconsistent! The sight of her old friend, the luxury she had renounced, the influence of the child she was going to see again, all her past, might captivate her once more, and tear her from a tyranny which he himself felt was heavy and hard to bear.

The fact was, he could no longer do without her. His egotistical vanity, his sickly fancies clung to her blind tenderness, her unremitting attentions, her fresh easy temper. Moreover, he would not be sorry to take a little journey, to escape for a while from the terrible lyric drama over which he had been struggling so long, with deep and sterile “hans!”

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Of course, he disguised his fears and his craving for amusement under chivalrous pretexts, telling Charlotte that he would not abandon her, that he would share her trouble as well as her happiness, and thus he kept up the woman's feeling of gratitude towards her lover in the midst of her sorrow as a mother. Moreover, the bustle incidental to all departures, soon diverted poor Lolotte's weak brain from the terrible blow that had just crushed her. Like those peasant widows, who, as soon as the husband is buried, prepare the large funeral repast, and forget their sobs in the duties of the housekeeper, so Charlotte, as she filled her trunk and gave instructions to Mother Archambault, almost forgot the heart-rending cause of her journey. At dinner, d'Argenton said to Doctor Hirsch :

"We are obliged to start off on a journey. The child has been misbehaving very seriously. We are going to Indret. You will keep house in our absence."

The Doctor did not ask any questions. He was not astonished at the misconduct of the lad ; and showed himself an excellent parasite, by exclaiming, like d'Argenton :

"I was certain of it."

They left by the night express, and reached Tours early the following morning. The *old friend* of the former Ida de Barancy lived outside Tours, in one of those pretty little châteaux that overlook the Loire—a dainty and well shaded abode, with avenues of trees running down to the river side, and turrets rising up against the horizon. "*Monsieur le Comte*" as Ida's servants formerly called him, was a widower without children, a kind man and a man of the world.

Notwithstanding the rather abrupt manner in which she had left him, he retained a kindly recollection of the

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merry and prattling young creature, who for some time had enlivened his solitude ; and in reply to Charlotte's note sent word that he would be very glad to see her.

They hired a carriage at the hotel, and, leaving the town, followed a fine road leading up the hill. Charlotte was rather worried at the tenacity the poet showed in accompanying her. She thought :

“ Will he want to come in with me ? ”

Notwithstanding her ignorance of the habits of society, she felt that this was not possible. She pondered over it in the carriage, while admiring the lovely country where she had spent some years of her wandering existence, where she had so often rambled about with her little Jack, the fair, elegant, pretty boy who was now a common workman in a blouse, awaiting the felon's garb.

Seated by her side, d'Argenton watched her out of the corner of his eyes, savagely biting his moustaches. She looked very pretty that morning, slightly paled by the emotion of the bad news, the fatigue of a night's journey, and her embarrassment at the visit she was about to make. All this, added to the black costume she had donned, which set forth the peach-like softness of her complexion, lent to her beauty a certain distinction which the sick nurse and housewife of Les Aulnettes had long since lost. The pontiff d'Argenton was worried, anxious, and thoroughly miserable. His was not the jealousy of an Othello which maddens and kills, but an enervating discomfort that creates awkwardness and stupidity. He was beginning to regret having accompanied her, he felt foolish and embarrassed at the peculiar role he was playing. Above all he was annoyed with himself at having allowed her to come.

The sight of the château completed his discomfiture. When Charlotte said “ It is there ”—when through the

trees he perceived its terraces and drawbridge thrown over a river shaded by summer foliage, but visible at this time of the year, when the landscape is delicately tinted with green, he accused himself of thoughtlessness, folly, and imprudence. Evidently once there, she would not leave again.

He was not yet aware how firmly he was rooted in the heart of this woman, and how all the treasures in the world could never draw her away from him.

"Is he never going to get down?" Charlotte said to herself, getting more and more anxious. At last, at the end of the avenue, he stopped the carriage.

"You will find me at the bottom of the road."

And he added with a sad and humble little smile :

"Do not stay too long."

"Oh ! no, dear, do not be afraid."

The carriage was already far ahead,—had nearly reached the gates, and he was still watching her. Five minutes later, looking over the park fence, he saw his mistress leaning on the arm of a tall, slight, elegant-looking man, still very upright, although his stiff gait showed him to be no longer young. When the couple disappeared d'Argenton had the impression of an immense void, and the sweep of Charlotte's skirt, as she turned a path, seemed ironical and irritating, as if he had felt it flung from afar in his face like a smarting blow on the cheek.

Then he was seized by a terrible anxiety. What could they be talking about ? Would he ever see her again ? And it was that wretched scamp who was the cause of this humiliating torture !

Seated on the worn-out step of a small door at one end of the large park into which Charlotte had disappeared, the poet feverishly waited, turning at every moment

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towards the gates, watching the carriage standing at the entrance, and the motionless coachman wrapped up in his cape. Around him a lovely landscape lay spread out, a landscape which might have thrown a feeling of peace and calm over the most painful agitation ; sloping vineyards, rich and regular, wooded hillocks, meadows crossed by streamlets bordered by willows ; then here and there, dotted about, some ruin of the days of Louis XI., or some of those pretty châteaux, so numerous on the banks of the Loire, their façades ornamented by a writhing salamander between two interwoven D's.

In the idleness begot by solitude and waiting in which anything catches the wandering thought, d'Argenton had been looking at a group of labourers digging a sort of drain for the overflow in the little valley curving at his feet. Drawing nearer to see better, he noticed that they were all dressed alike, in blue blouses and coarse calico trousers. and that those he had taken from afar for peasants, were in reality children under the orders of a superintendent, half peasant, half gentleman, who directed the diggers and traced the lines of the canal.

The silent way in which this open-air work was carried on by such youthful labourers was striking. Not a word, not a sound betrayed the natural excitement of beings in motion who feel and are exercising their strength.

"Straighter ! not so fast," cried the superintendent ; and the tools struggled, the perspiring faces bent over the earth, and at moments, when they raised themselves to take breath, narrow foreheads, pointed craniums, heads bearing the stamp of atrophy or debauchery were visible. Most assuredly these children had not been brought up in the freedom of nature, for the pallor of most of them, their reddened or half opened eyes, told of the misery of



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town life, the stifling atmosphere of poverty-stricken quarters and unhealthy habitations.

“Who are these children?” inquired the poet.

“Ah, Monsieur does not belong to these parts. They are the convicts of Mettray, the agricultural penitentiary over there.” And the superintendent pointed to a group of new and regular white houses, on the opposite hill-side. The poet had heard of this penal settlement, but knew nothing of its rules nor mode of admittance. He interrogated the man, saying he was on intimate terms with a family whose only son had just plunged them into the deepest grief.

“Send him to us when he comes out of prison.”

“The fact is,” said d’Argenton in a tone of regret, “I do not think he will be sent to prison. The parents can avoid that by paying up the money.”

“In that case, we cannot receive him. We only admit young prisoners. But we have an annex to our establishment, the *Maison Paternelle*, in which the solitary system is applied to youths.”

“Ah, really; the solitary system?”

“And which succeeds with the most rebellious natures. I have a few leaflets about it, if Monsieur would like to read them.”

D’Argenton accepted, gave a little money for the young convicts and returned up the road with the pamphlets. The gates of the château were just closed, and the carriage was coming down the avenue.

At last!

Charlotte, beaming, happy and bright-eyed, hurried to meet her poet.

“Get in quick,” said she.

She put her arm through his, and trembling with joy:

“I have been successful.”



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"Ah!" said he.

"Beyond all my hopes."

He repeated, drily and indifferently, "Ah!" and affected to turn over and be deeply interested in his pamphlets, to show her that all the rest did not concern him. He had not been so proud just now when biting his nails at the closed gate, but now that she nestled up to him, humble and submissive, it was really not worth while worrying himself. Before his silence, Charlotte too held her peace, fancying his jealous pride wounded, and he was obliged to resume the conversation.

"So you have been successful?"

"Completely so, my dear. It had always been *someone's* intention to make Jack a present at his majority to purchase a substitute for military service, and permit of his settling in life. The present was to be ten thousand francs (four hundred pounds). They were handed to me immediately. There are the six thousand francs to reimburse, and four thousand *someone* told me to use in the manner most advantageous for the child's interests."

"The use is found. Buy the right to a cell at the *Maison Paternelle* of Mettray for two or three years. It is only there that a thief has any chance of becoming an honest man."

She started at the word thief, which recalled to her the sad reality. In that poor little brain, the evanescent and constantly changing impression of the moment effaced in a few seconds all trace of an idea.

She bent her head.

"I am ready to do anything you wish," said she. "You have been so kind, so generous! I shall never forget it."

Under his big moustache, the poet's lips quivered with pleasure and pride. More than ever he felt he was

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master. He took the opportunity of making a long sermon. She had much cause for self-reproach. Her maternal weakness was not foreign to all that had taken place. A child, spoilt as her's was, abandoned to his bad instincts, could not fail to become a villain. For the future it would require a man's hand to manage this restive horse. If he were confided to his care, he would undertake to make him follow the right path.

Two or three times he repeated :

"I will crush or master him."

She did not reply. Her happiness at the thought that her child would not be sent to prison absorbed every other idea. They at once decided to start the same evening for Indret. However, in order to spare her a terrible humiliation, it was agreed that she should remain at Basse-Indre. D'Argenton would go alone to carry the money and fetch the culprit, whom they would at once take to the penal settlement. He already called it "the settlement," and saw in his mind's eye Jack clothed in the blue cotton jacket, among the wretched little convicts, victims for the most part of the vices and crimes of their parents, and who, from their earliest infancy, are enrolled in the great regiment of reprobates.

It was on a Sunday that they stepped out of the train at the large industrial station of Basse-Indre, and hired the best room of a roadside inn, the country absolutely lacking any proper accommodation for travellers. While the poet went off on his errand as executioner, Charlotte awaited his return, alone in this sordid room, invaded by the noise and laughter and drunken row, the drawling and mournful songs, which the Bretons drone out in a peculiar wailing tone, as melancholy as the sea, or the waste moorlands of the *landes*. Sailors' choruses mingled with these, livelier and coarser, but as sad. The vulgar

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tumult of the pot-house, and the monotonous drizzling rain that ceaselessly beat against the window, imparted to this unhappy woman a singular impression of the exile to which her child had been condemned. However guilty, he was always her son, her Jack ; and their close neighbourhood brought back to her mind the happy years they had spent together.

Why had she abandoned him ?

She remembered him as a child, charming and delicate, full of intelligence and affection, and at the thought that she was about to behold a thieving workman, and that he would be her son, the vague remorse that had tortured her for the last two years, rose up before her like a menacing spectre. This was, then, the result of her weakness ! If Jack had remained with her instead of being thrown amid the depravity of a workshop—if she had sent him to school with children of his own age, would he have become a thief ? Oh, the prediction of the Doctor was indeed but too well fulfilled. She was going to find him degraded and humiliated !

The vulgarity of this Sunday holiday, the noise and bustle that surrounded her, augmented her remorse. It was here that her Jack had been living for two years ! All the disgust of her superficial nature, incapable of feeling the grandeur of any accomplished task, of a life gained by the sweat of the brow, was aroused at this idea. In order to divert her sad thoughts, she took up the prospectus of the “settlement” that was lying open before her. The words made her shudder : “*Paternal House. School of repression. The system adopted is solitary confinement. The children are put in separate cells, and never see each other, even at chapel.*” With a heavy heart, she folded the paper and went to the window to watch the return of the poet and the arrival of the child, with

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her eyes intently fixed on a little corner of the Loire, she could just see yonder, at the end of the lane, as agitated as the sea and mottled by the rain.

Meanwhile d'Argenton was going on to accomplish his mission, and right glad he was to accomplish it. He would not have missed it on any account. He who loved to strike an attitude, had now a golden opportunity before him. He had already prepared the speech he would make to the culprit, the apologies he would insist on his making on bended knee in the manager's office. At present, all these premeditated attitudes were shown by the majestic way in which he held his head aloft, the solemn air adapted to the occasion; while, sombre and gloved in black, holding his umbrella high and stiff, he ascended the main street of Indret, deserted at this hour on account of vespers and the bad weather.

An old woman pointed out Roudic's house. He passed before the silent workshops, now at rest with their smoky and blackened roofs pleasantly cooling in the rain. But when he reached the house he had been shown, he hesitated and stopped, thinking he must be mistaken. Of all the houses in this barrack-like row, this was the gayest and most animated. From the half-open windows on the ground floor burst forth a joyful sound of Breton song, and the heavy tread of peasants' stamping on the floor like on a freshly beaten thrashing ground. They were dancing to an accompaniment of singing, *au son des bouches*, as they say in Brittany, and dancing with the spirit that voices lend to the rhythm and measure.

"It is impossible. It cannot be there," thought d'Argenton, prepared to find a disconsolate household among whom he would appear as a saviour.

Suddenly they called out:

"Come, Zénaïde, give us the *Plat d'Etain*."

And several voices noisily exclaimed :

" Yes, yes, Zénaïde, the *Plat d'Etain*."

" Zénaïde !" surely that was the name of Roudic's daughter.

These folk were taking their disaster very gaily, to be sure !

While he still hesitated, a woman's voice, began in a shrill falsetto :

" C'est dans la cour du Plat d'Etain." *

And the chorus, with a few men's voices added to it, re-echoed :

" C'est dans la cour du Plat d'Etain."

And a whirlwind of white coifs passed in front of the window with a rustle of skirts and panting voices.

" Come, Brigadier ! Come Jack !" they cried.

This time it really was too much of a good thing ! Thoroughly mystified, the poet pushed open the door, and, in the midst of the dust kicked up by the wild dance, the first person he caught sight of was Jack, the thief, the future convict, skipping about with some seven or eight young girls amongst whom a fat roundabout, jolly and red, was hurrying along a neat-looking custom-house brigadier. Driven against the wall, hunted out of every corner, a worthy grey-headed man, happy and beaming, and delighted at all this mirth, was striving to make a tall pale young woman, who was smiling sadly, take some share in it.

What had taken place ?

Just this :

* " 'Tis in the yard of the Pewter Dish."

The day after he had written to Jack's mother, Madame Roudic, trembling and agitated, had gone to the manager's office. Without noticing the coldness of her reception, her shame having long since accustomed her to the silent contempt of all honest folk, she refused the proffered chair, and upright, with a boldness that astonished him, she began : " I come to tell you, Monsieur, that the apprentice is not guilty. It is not he who has stolen my step-daughter's dower."

The manager started on his chair.

" The proofs, however, madame are evident."

" What proofs? The most overwhelming of all is that my husband being absent, Jack was alone with us in the house. Well, Monsieur, it is just this proof that I have come to refute. There was another man besides Jack that night in our house."

" A man !—the Nantais ? "

She made a sign, " Yes, the Nantais."

Oh ! how pale she was !

" Then it was the Nantais who took the money ? "

Was there a moment's hesitation on the deathlike countenance ?

In any case, her answer was calm and steady :

" No : it was not the Nantais who took the money. It was I—to give to him."

" Unhappy woman ! "

" Oh, yes ! unhappy indeed. He said it was only for two days, and I have waited all this time, face to face with my husband's despair and Zénaïde's tears, and the terrible dread lest an innocent person should be condemned. What torture ! Nothing came. Then I wrote a line. ' If tomorrow, at eleven, I have received nothing, I shall denounce myself and you also.' And here I am."

“Here you are, here you are! What can I do now?”

“I want you to arrest the real culprits now that you know them.”

“But your husband? He will die of this double dishonour.”

“And I then?” said she, with bitter pride. “To die is the easiest thing. What I am now doing is far more painful, I can assure you!”

She spoke of dying with a sort of wild fierceness. She longed for it, called for it with a rapture she had never felt towards her lover.

“If your death could repair your fault,” said the manager, gravely, “if it could restore the poor child’s dower, I should understand your wishing to die. But now, it is you only whom a suicide would relieve. The situation would remain the same, only aggravated and more desperate—that is all.”

“What is to be done, then?” she said, despondingly; and in her uncertainty she relapsed once more into the old Clarisse, the long feeble body, shaken by a struggle too great for it to bear.

“First of all, we must try and save whatever we can of the money. Perhaps some is still left.”

Clarisse shook her head. She knew the inveterate gambler. She knew how he had taken the money, how he had almost trampled over her, in his hurry to get at the casket, and she knew that he must have played and lost it to the very last farthing.

The manager had rung. A superintendent entered, the ex-constable, Bélisaire’s special enemy.

“You will start immediately for Saint Nazaire,” ordered his chief, and “You will tell the Nantais I want him at once. You will even wait for him, to be more sure.”

“The Nantais is at Indret, Monsieur. I have just seen

him coming out of Madame Roudic's house. He cannot be far off, certainly."

"Very well then. Look quickly for him and bring him back here. Above all, do not warn him that you have seen Madame Roudic in my office. He must not suspect anything."

"I understand," said the perspicacious superintendent, winking, although he had not the slightest inkling of what was going on.

He turned on his heels and went out.

After his departure, they remained silent. Leaning against a corner of the desk, Clarisse stood musing, mute and rigid; the unceasing noise of labour in the shops, the groans and screeching of the steam, now imploring, now threatening or plaintive, made a proper accompaniment to the tumult of her thoughts. The door opened briskly.

"You have sent for me, Monsieur?" said the Nantais in a cheerful voice.

Clarisse's presence, her pallor, the stern look of the Manager—he understood all!

She had kept her word.

For a minute, his bold brutal countenance was convulsed with a mad frenzy, the frenzy of a man at bay who kills to escape from a position without issue; but he staggered under the effect of the mental struggle, and ended by sinking down in front of the table.

"Forgive me!" he murmured.

The Manager motioned to him to rise:

"Spare us your supplications and tears. We know all that. Let us come at once to facts. This woman has robbed her husband and her daughter for you. You had promised to bring back the money in two days."

The Nantais threw a glance of agonized gratitude towards his mistress, who by her lie had saved him! But

Clarisse did not look at him. She did not feel tempted to look at him. She had seen him too well, that night of the crime.

"Where is the money?" repeated the Manager.

"Here it is. I was bringing it."

He was, indeed, bringing it back, but not having found Clarisse at home, he was about to carry it off still faster towards the gambling den, to try his luck again. He was, indeed, a true gambler.

The Manager took up the bank notes from the table.

"Is it all here?"

"There are eight hundred francs missing," said the other, hesitating.

"Oh, yes, I understand. A sum kept for to-night's stakes?"

"No, I swear not. I have lost them. But I will return them."

"It is needless. You are not asked for anything. The eight hundred francs lacking I will replace. I do not choose that child to lose a farthing of her dower. Now, Roudic must be told how the money disappeared and how it is returned. Sit there and write."

He reflected for a moment, while the Nantais sat down at the table and took up a pen. Clarisse raised her head. She waited; that letter was to be life or death for her!

"Begin: *To the Manager: Sir, it is I who in a moment of folly, took six thousand francs from the Roudics' cupboard.*"

The Nantais made a gesture of protestation, but he was afraid of Clarisse, and allowed the facts to be thus re-established in all their cruel and logical exactitude.

"The Roudics' cupboard ——" said he, repeating the last word.

The Manager continued :—

“Here is the money; I cannot keep it. It burns my fingers. Free those unhappy fellows I have allowed to be suspected, and beg my uncle to forgive me. Tell him that I quit the workshops, and leave without daring to see him. I shall return when, by dint of hard work and repentance, I shall have regained the right to clasp the hand of a honest man. Now, the date, and sign.”

And seeing him hesitate :

“Beware, young man ! I warn you that if you do not sign that letter, I shall immediately have this woman arrested.”

The Nantais signed without a word. The Manager rose.

“Now you can leave. Go to Guérigny if you choose, and try and behave yourself. In any case remember that if I hear you are seen prowling about Indret, the constables shall take you up at once as a thief. Your letter authorizes them.”

The Nantais made a slight bow and cast a glance at Clarisse as he passed. But the spell was broken. She gently turned away her head, determined not to see him again, and to retain intact in her conscience and remorse the hideous image she had kept of the infamous thief at his night’s work. Directly he had left, Madame Roudic approached the Manager and clasped her hands with an expression of gratitude.

“Do not thank me, Madame ; it is for your husband’s sake, to spare that honest man the most cruel torture, that I have thus acted.”

“It is also on account of my husband that I thank you, Monsieur. I think but of him, and the sacrifice I am about to make is the best proof of it.”

“What sacrifice?”

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“That of living, when I would so gladly die, sleep for ever! Everything was ready and settled in my mind. Ah indeed, it must be for Roudic that I consent to live. I long so much for rest, I am so weary!”

And in truth, the marvellous strength which had sustained her during this scene gave way, and her natural apathy reappeared in the complete collapse of her whole being; she looked as she went away slightly bent, so depressed, so utterly worn out, that the Manager feared a catastrophe and said to her gently:—

“Come, Madame, a little courage! Remember that Roudic will be very unhappy when he reads this letter—that it will be a terrible blow to him. You must not overwhelm him with another misfortune far greater and more irreparable.”

“That is also what I strive to remember,” she said, and slowly departed.

It was indeed a terrible grief for poor Roudic to learn his nephew’s fault from the Manager himself. It required all Zénaïde’s raptures of delight on getting back her dower, and hugging her casket, to soothe, in the heart of this worthy man, the painful surprise which all honest natures feel in the presence of infamy and ingratitude. His first words were: “My wife was so fond of him!” And those who heard his cruel naïveté blushed for him.

And the Aztec! Ah, the poor Aztec had his day of triumph. An order of the day drawn up by the Manager and proclaiming his thorough innocence was posted up at all the doors of the workshops. He was surrounded and congratulated; the Roudics overwhelmed him with excuses and apologies, and protestations of affection! One thing alone was wanting to his happiness—Bélisaire!

The moment his cage was opened, the moment he was told “You are free!” the hawker had disappeared with-

out a word. All this seemed to him so hazy, the dread lest he should be taken up again, spurred him on so violently, that his one thought was to escape and run off as fast as his poor wounded feet would allow him. Jack was in despair when he heard of his abrupt departure. He wished to exculpate himself in the eyes of this unfortunate fellow, who had been on his account unmercifully thrashed, imprisoned for two days, and nearly ruined by the disaster that had befallen his goods. Moreover, he was distressed at the idea that Bélisaire had certainly gone off supposing him guilty, as no one had had time to undeceive him, and the thought that this miserable vagabond should think him a thief cast a gloom over his joy.

Nevertheless, he had enjoyed the breakfast at the brigadier's and Zénaïde's betrothal, and was dancing like the others *au son des bouches*, when d'Argenton made his entry. The poet's appearance, majestic and black-gloved, produced on the joyous assembly much the same effect as a hawk would, swooping down in the midst of a troop of playful swallows. The fact is, when an expression befitting to the circumstances has been got up, it is not easy suddenly to transform it. D'Argenton's attitude proved this. In vain did they explain to him that the money had been found again ; that Jack's innocence had been fully proved ; and that in coming to Indret he had crossed a second letter from the Manager, intended to redress all the evil caused by the first one. In vain did he see all these worthy folk treat the apprentice like one of the family—from old Roudic who affectionately smacked him on the shoulder and called him " Little lad," down to Zénaïde, who seized his head in her big hands and took a delight in vigorously rubbing up his hair the wrong way, thinking the while of the pleasure she would have in doing the same to Brigadier Mangin ! The poet was not one iota

less solemn or dignified. He expressed to Roudic in very moving terms his regret at the grief that had been caused him, begging him to accept his excuses and those of Jack's mother.

"But it is I who should make excuses to the poor child!" exclaimed Roudic.

D'Argenton was not listening. He spoke of honour, duty, of the terrible difficulties that arise from misconduct. Jack, though comparatively innocent, had yet many reasons to feel confused; he could not forget the day at Nantes, the state in which Brigadier Mangin, here present, could affirm he had seen him. He blushed, and lost his countenance during the pontiff's sermon. At last, when the latter had kept these good people a full hour under the charm of his eloquence, distilling a dulness and heavy somnolence to which father Roudic would soon have succumbed:

"You must be very thirsty after speaking so long," said the fitter, naively; and he ordered up a jug of cider and a buckwheat cake which Zénaïde had made for lunch, and which, forsooth, looked so good, so tempting with its golden-coloured crust, that the poet, possessed as it is known of a voracious appetite, allowed himself to be tempted, and took as enormous a slice of it, as Bélisaire's knife had cut out of the famous ham at Les Aulnettes.

Of the long speech he had heard, Jack retained only one thing, and that was that d'Argenton had made a long journey to bring the money to Indret and save him from the disgrace of being seated on a criminal's bench. The poet had not failed to use the bank notes contained in his pocket-book to produce a sensation during the solemn scene he had enacted. Several times he had tapped his pocket, saying, "I had brought the money." And the child, innocently believing that d'Argenton had really

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taken six thousand francs of his own money, expressly to save him, began to think that he had been mistaken in his antipathy for the man, and that the repulsion and indifference he had always shown him were only on the surface. Never before had he been so respectful, so affectionate towards the "Enemy," and the latter in his turn, amazed at the improvement in the restive horse of yore, at once attributed to himself the merit of the change, saying :—

"I have mastered him !"

This idea, together with the kind reception the Roudics had given him, put him in excellent good humour.

Really, to see the poet and the apprentice walking down the streets of Indret, arm in arm, and sauntering on the banks of the Loire, they might have been taken for two devoted friends.

Jack was so happy to be able to speak of his mother, to ask all about her, to breathe her presence so to speak in the person of the man she loved ! Ah ! if he had known that she was so near to him, and that for the last hour d'Argenton, wavering between a remnant of pity and his ferocious egotism, had been debating within himself :

"Shall I say she is here or not ?"

The fact is that when he came to pontify at Indret, the poet was far from imagining such a *dénouement*. He would have been only too delighted to have dragged the guilty child into the presence of the mother, who, in her deep mortification, could not decently have shown him the least affection ; but to offer to her love a triumphant hero, the victim of a judicial error,—to witness their effusions, the emotions of two hearts made to beat for one another—this was beyond his strength !

However, to commit such an odious action, to refuse to poor Charlotte and her son the joy of meeting, when they

were so near each other, he must needs find a pretext, a subterfuge, a reason which should wear some appearance of justice and could be set forth in high-sounding words. Jack himself furnished the pretext.

Fancy poor little Jack, caught at this unusual kindness, and seized with a sudden impulsive burst of confidence, confessing to d'Argenton that he had decidedly no taste for the life he was leading, that he felt he would never be a good workman, that he was too isolated, too far from his mother, that he longed for a life more in keeping with his tastes and strength! Oh! it was not work that frightened him! Only he would have liked work where his arms would have less to do and his brain more.

As he spoke, Jack pressed the poet's hand, and as he did so, felt it relax in his hold and coldly withdraw. And now he was again met by the immovable face, the cruel, steel-blue glance of the "Enemy."

"You pain me, Jack, you pain me very much; and your mother would be distressed if she knew you had such ideas. Have you forgotten what I have told you so often? There are no more mischievous beings in the world than dreamers. Let us beware of Utopias and reveries. This century is one of iron. To work, Jack, to work!"

He had to listen to an hour of this, the poor unhappy boy!—an hour of this preaching, which he felt to be far more penetrating, keen, and freezing than the rain which was falling at the time, far more sombre than the night which was beginning to shroud the landscape.

Moreover, while they were walking backwards and forwards on the embankment, a woman was waiting yonder on the other side of the Loire, a woman who finding the hours too long, had ventured out on the quay, whence she was watching for the ferry-boat that was presently to bring her the little criminal, the beloved child she

had not seen for two years. But d'Argenton had now got hold of his pretext. In the deplorable state of mind the fellow was in, the sight of his mother could only injure him, take away the little courage he had left. It was more prudent he should not see her. Charlotte would be reasonable enough to understand and make the necessary sacrifice in the interest of her son. "Life is not a romance," confound it.

And thus it was that, separated only by the breadth of the Loire, so near indeed that with a loud call they might have heard one another, Jack and his mother did not meet on that evening, nor for many a year after.



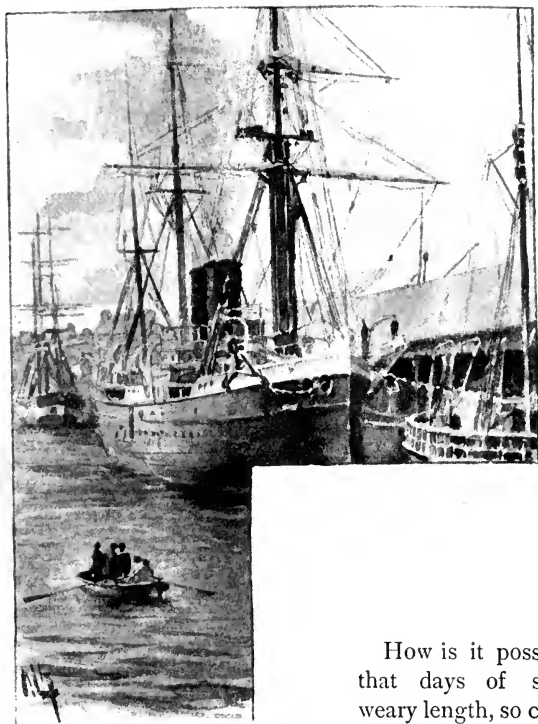


VIII.

THE STOKE-HOLE.



The child, dressed English fashion, resembled the pretty godson of Lord Peambock.



How is it possible that days of such weary length, so completely and so toilsomely filled, should make up such short years?

It is two years, two whole years already, since Zénaïde was married and Jack was the hero of a terrible adventure. What has he been doing during these two years? He has worked and laboured, toiling stage by stage up the road

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that leads the apprentice to skill and workman's pay. He has passed from the squeezer to the finishing of the iron. He has learnt forging both by hydraulic pressure and by the hammer. His hands have grown callous, his intelligence the same. At night, he falls on his bed, worn out with fatigue, for he is not strong; he sleeps without waking, and on the morrow begins his life again—a life devoid of encouragement, aimless and pleasureless. The wine shop, since the famous journey to Nantes, fills him with disgust. The Roudics' house is gloomy now that Monsieur and Madame Mangin are settled at Pouliguen on the coast; it seems uninhabited since the departure of the big girl, just as her room seemed empty from the day she took her cupboard out of it, the great cupboard belonging to her trousseau.

Madame Roudic never goes out, but remains seated at a corner of the window with the curtain never drawn aside; she no longer expects anyone, and her days drag along in a weary, automatic indifference, letting her life ebb away, like the blood from an open wound. Father Roudic alone keeps the serenity born of a happy conscience! His little eyes, so sharp and so keen, have preserved the acuteness of their glance, contrasting strangely with the simplicity of his blind and credulous mind, for which evil does not exist.

No events in Jack's life, not the smallest! The last winter has been very severe, the Loire has made great ravages, invaded nearly the whole of the island, one part of which has remained under water for two months. Work has been carried on in the damp, amid an atmosphere of fog and the exhalations of a swamp. Jack has coughed a good deal, passed many fevered hours in the infirmary; but these are not events. Few and far between letters have come from Etiolles, very tender when his mother has written secretly, cold and sermonizing when

the poet has dictated over her shoulder. The doings and the movements of d'Argenton were the ordinary theme of these letters of his patient victim. Jack had thus learnt that "*The Daughter of Faust*" had been completed, read to the comedians of the Théâtre Français; that these wretches had had the audacity to refuse it unanimously, and that in return they had drawn down upon themselves one of the poet's cutting phrases. Another great piece of news was the reconciliation with the Moronvals, who were now admitted to the hospitality of "*Parva domus*," where, of a Sunday, they brought the multi-coloured *pays chauds*, to the dismay and terror of old Mother Archambauld.

Moronval, Mâdou, the Gymnase! How far off all this was from him now, farther than the distance from Indret to the Passage des Douze Maisons, farther than there were years between that fantastic past and the gloomy present! The Jack of those days seemed to him to be a Jack of a superior and more refined race, who had bequeathed nothing of his fair locks, of his soft and downy skin, to this great bronzed and lanky fellow with the red cheek-bones, the round back, and high thin shoulders pointing under his blouse.

Thus were Monsieur Rivals' words justified: "It is social differences which make real separations."

The recollection of the Rivals, is another of Jack's griefs. Notwithstanding d'Argenton's disparaging observations, he has retained in his heart a lively gratitude towards that excellent man, a tender friendship for little Cécile, and every year on the first of January he writes them a long letter. Well, twice have his letters remained without any reply. Why, what can he possibly have done to these people?

One word alone sustained our friend Jack in the disappointments of his sad fate: "Earn your living; your

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mother will some day have need of you." But alas! wages are proportioned to the value of the work done, not to the good will of the workman. Good will is nothing, it is power that is wanted. And Jack has no power. Notwithstanding Labassindre's predictions, he will never be anything but a *chouffiqueur* in his business. He has no turn for it, what more can be said? And now at seventeen years of age, his apprenticeship finished, he can only earn half-a-crown a day, and that with difficulty. With this half-crown he must pay for his board and lodging, he must clothe himself, that is to say, replace his apron and his smock when they will no longer hold together. A fine trade to have put into his hands! And what would he do if his mother were to write to him: "I am coming. I am coming to live with you."

"Look here, little chap," said old Roudic, who had continued to call the apprentice by the title of "little chap," though the latter was now a head taller than himself, "your parents were wrong not to listen to me; you are not in your right place here. You will never get the knack of using the file, and we shall be obliged to keep you always employed on coarse work which will barely furnish you with your daily bread. In your place I would sooner roll up my duds, and seek my fortune through the wide world. See here! the other day, Blanchet, the chief engineer of the *Cydnus*, came to us in the fitting shop in search of stokers. If you are not afraid of the engine-room, you might try the job. You would get five shillings a day, while going round the world, lodged, fed, and warmed!—aye, that's just it, warmed! It is a hard trade, but one gets used to it, since I did it for two years, and here I am. Come now, shall I write to Blanchet?"

"Yes, Monsieur Roudic; I would rather do that."


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The idea of gaining double pay, of seeing the world, that love of travel which was a legacy of his childhood, of Mâdou's stories, of the voyages of the *Bayonnaise* as recounted by Monsieur Rivals, these and many other reasons finally decided Jack to become a stoker, an employment which is the common resource of all indifferent workers in iron, all the "Failures" of the hammer and the anvil, and which needs only strength and a great power of endurance.

He left Indret one July morning, just four years after his arrival.

What a beautiful day this was also !

From the deck of the little packet, on which Jack stood by the side of old Roudic, who had insisted on accompanying him, the view was a striking one. The river widened at every turn of the paddle-wheel, pushing and spreading its banks asunder with all its force, as if to prepare for the vaster space where it was to debouch into the sea. The air became fresher, the trees diminished in height, the two shores as they drew away from each other were flattened out in the distance, and seemed to be spread around by the strong wind blowing ahead of them. Here and there marshes gleamed amid the cultivated land, smoke rose from the peat pits, thousands of gulls and sea-mews, a cloud of mingled white and black, skimmed the waves uttering their shrill cries. But all this disappeared, lost in the approaching immensity of the ocean, which suffers no other grandeur beside its own, just as it permits no vegetation by the side of the bitter sterility of its waves.

Suddenly, with one bound, the little packet emerged on the open sea. How else define this new motion of her whole gear, the rocking, swaying movement which the water, steeped in dazzling light, lying free under the

gigantic breath of the wind, seemed to continue from one crest to another to the very extremest verge of the horizon, to that green-hued line where to the eager gaze sky and water close the immensity of space? Jack had never seen the sea. The fresh and salt odour, the gust of air which the rising tide detaches as with the wave of a fan from every billow, filled him with the intoxication of travel.

Far away on the right, Saint-Nazaire projected its roofs huddled together among the rocks, to the margin of the waves, its belfry keeping watch on the headland, its jetty continuing the street into the sea. Between the houses, masts rose and mingled, seeming from a distance to be so closely crowded that one might suppose that one single blast of wind had pushed this bundle of spars into the shelter of the port. On nearer view, they separated, becoming larger and more distinct.

They landed at the jetty. There they learnt that the *Cydnus*, a great steamer of the Transatlantic Company, was to start that very day, in two or three hours' time, and that since the previous evening she lay outside. This is the only method so far discovered by which it is possible to get the whole crew on board in time for the moment of departure, without being obliged to send round the police to beat up every low tavern in Saint-Nazaire.

Jack and his companion, therefore, had no time to see the town, which at this hour was filled with the animation and bustle of a market-day, overflowing even to the harbour. The quays were all strewn with bunches of green stuff, baskets of fruit, and fowls tied two and two, beating their wings against the ground with shrill cackling. Before their wares stood lines of Breton peasant men and women, with idly hanging arms, waiting

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quietly and silently for a customer. No haste, not the least appeal to the passers-by. By way of contrast was the crowd of petty pedlars, with their flat baskets filled with neck-ties, purses, pins, or rings, who went noisily about, offering their wares. Sailors of all countries, small citizens of Saint-Nazaire, the wives of mechanics or of the clerks of the company, were hastening to the market, where the cook of the *Cydnus* was completing his final purchases. Roudic learnt from him that Blanchet was on board, and furious because he had not his full complement of stokers.

“Make haste, little chap, we are late.”

They jumped into a boat and crossed the floating basin crowded with vessels. Here it was no longer similar to the river harbour of Nantes, sprinkled with shipping of all sizes. Nothing here but huge vessels and an appearance of rest and sheltered calm. Hammer blows from the graving dock, and the cries of a few fowls that were being put on board, alone broke the crystalline, sonorous silence that reigns over undisturbed waters. The huge Atlantic liners, ponderous and silent, ranged alongside the quays, seemed to sleep between two journeys across the ocean. Great English vessels, just arrived from Calcutta, reared on high their numerous tiers of cabins, their high bows, and their substantial sides, covered just now with a swarm of sailors busily engaged in repainting them. They passed between these motionless masses, beneath which the water assumed the sombre hues of a canal running between thick walls, with a gear of chains and ropes just drawn up and all dripping. At last they were out of the harbour and cleared the jetty, beyond the point of which the *Cydnus*, with steam up, lay waiting the tide.

A nervous, dried-up little man in shirt sleeves, with three gold stripes on his cap. addressed himself to Jack

and Roudic, whose boat had just ranged up alongside the steamer. His words could scarcely be heard in the tumult and bustle of the last moment, but his gestures were eloquent enough. It was Blanchet, the chief engineer, called by his men "the Moco.*" As soon as the din of baggage being lowered into the open hold allowed him to make himself heard:

"Hurry up there! here's d—d good luck," cried he with a fearful southern accent, "I thought you were going to throw me over."

"It is my fault, old fellow," said Roudic. "I wanted to come with the little chap, and I couldn't get away yesterday."

"By Jingo! He is a long piece of goods, your little chap. We shall be obliged to fold him up in four to lay him down in the stokers' cabin. Come, *zou*, let's go down quickly, and I will settle him."

They descended a little spiral copper staircase, with a narrow rail, then another without a rail, upright as a ladder, then another and yet another.

Jack, who had never seen a "Liner," was struck dumb with amazement at the size and the depth of this one. They were descending into an abyss where the eye fresh from the light of day, could distinguish neither objects nor men. It was dark night, the darkness of a mine, lighted by hanging lamps, and suffocating from want of air and increasing heat. One last ladder, down which they crawled, led to the engine-room, a perfect oven, filled with an atmosphere which was rendered almost insufferable by the damp and heavy heat, mixed with a strong smell of oil and with a floating vapour of steam, above

* The French navy is divided into two great races—the *Moco* and the *Ponantais*, Bretagne and Provence, Northerns and Southerns.

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which three or four stages higher up appeared a little patch of blue sky seen through an air-hole.

A prodigious activity reigned here. The engineers, the assistants, the apprentices, went and came, passing a general inspection of the machinery, making sure that every part was complete and in full working order. They had just finished filling up the boilers, and already they were drawing and rumbling furiously. The iron, copper, cast-iron, anointed with boiling oil, shone and sparkled; and the excessive cleanliness of the engines gave them something of a fierce appearance, as though those handles which burnt when they were touched even by hands enveloped in tow—these incandescent pistons, these knobs moved by iron hooks, shone from all the fire they had absorbed. Jack looked with curiosity at the formidable beast. He had seen plenty at Indret, but this one seemed more terrible to him, doubtless because he knew that he would be obliged to be constantly near it, and to furnish it day and night with its food. Here and there, thermometers, manometers, a compass, the telegraphic dial by which orders were transmitted, caught the light of the great lamps with their reflectors.

At the end of the engine-room, a dark and narrow passage led away into further gloom. "Here are the coal bunkers," said Blanchet, showing a hole yawning in the wall. By the side of this hole was another, where a lamp threw its light upon a few pallets and a few clothes hanging up. It was here the stokers slept. Jack shuddered as he looked. The Moronval dormitory, the garret of the Roudics, these chance shelters wherein he had dreamt his childish dreams, were palaces in comparison!

"And here's the stoke-hole," added the *Moco*, pushing open a little door.

Imagine a long burning cellar, an alley of the catacombs, illuminated by the red glare of a dozen furnaces in full combustion. Men almost naked were stirring up the fires, raking out cinder boxes, actively engaged in front of these braziers, which congested their streaming faces. The engine-room was stifling, this one was burning!

"Here's your man," said Blanchet to the head stoker, introducing Jack.

"He comes in the nick of time," said the other, hardly turning round, "I want some one for the cinders."

"Good luck to you, little chap!" said father Roudic, giving his apprentice a hearty shake of the hand.

And Jack was forthwith set to work at the cinders. All the refuse of coal by which the ash boxes are blocked and choked, is thrown into baskets which are carried up on deck to be emptied into the sea. It is hard work. The baskets are heavy, the ladders steep; suffocating too is the transition from the fresh air to the asphyxia of the abyss below. At the third journey, Jack felt his legs give way beneath him. Incapable even of raising his basket, he stood exhausted, covered with a perspiration that seemed to take all spring out of him, when one of the stokers, seeing his condition, took a large flask of brandy from a corner and offered it to him.

"No thanks, I never drink brandy," said Jack.

"Oh, you'll come to it," said the other, laughing.

"Never!" said Jack, and straightening himself by a supreme effort of will far more than by the effort of his muscles, he took the heavy basket on his back and courageously carried it up.

The deck presented an animated and picturesque scene. The little tender bringing the passengers had just arrived, and ranged alongside the great steamer. It brought on board a crowd of travellers, hurried, dazed, offering an

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amazing diversity of costume and language; all the countries of the world holding rendezvous on that neutral, international ground, called the deck of a vessel. The crowd ran hither and thither, in the effort to get settled. Some were gay, some were still weeping after a hurried farewell, but all bore on their features signs of hope or care; for change of scene or abode is nearly always the result of a disturbance of life, a sudden turn of fortune's wheel; and generally a move from one continent to another is the consequence and final shock of some moral earthquake. Thus it happens that mourning is often side by side with adventure on the decks of steamers, and mingles its sadness with the feverish excitement of the voyage.

This singular fever reigned all around: in the noisy rising of the tide, in the impatience of the vessel straining at her anchors, in the bustle of the small boats surrounding her. Yonder, on the jetty, it animated the crowd which, full of curiosity and emotion, had come to wave a farewell to the travellers, or to follow some loved one as far as the eye could reach; looking, on the narrow space, like a dark bar which stood out against the blue horizon. This fever could be felt in the redoubled ardour of the fishing-boats as they put out to sea with full sails for what a night of struggle and danger might bring them; and the great incoming vessels felt it beat against their drooping sails, like a regret for the lovely countries they had visited. While the embarkation was being completed, while the bell ringing in the fore part of the ship hastened the last loads, Jack, his basket of cinders emptied, remained leaning against the nettings watching the travellers, the well equipped and comfortably dressed cabin passengers, and the steerage passengers, seated on their slender baggage. Whither were they bound?

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What chimera were they following? What cold and cruel reality awaited them on their arrival? One couple especially interested him; a mother and her child, recalling as they did to his mind the image of Ida and little Jack, in days when they too held each other by the hand. The woman, young and dressed all in black, was wrapped in a Mexican *sarapé* with great stripes, and had that independent air acquired by the wives of naval and military men, through the frequent absences of their husbands. The child, dressed English fashion, so resembled the pretty godson of Lord Peambock that he might have been mistaken for him.

When they passed near Jack, both moved away a little, and the long silk dress was sharply drawn closer, in order not to touch the sleeves of the stoker, all black with coal. It was an almost imperceptible movement, but he understood it; and for the moment it seemed to him that his past, that beloved past composed of two personages which he invoked when life was at its worst, had just renounced him and gone from him for ever.

A Marseillais oath, accompanied by a violent thump of the fist between his shoulders, interrupted his sad reverie.

“Back with you to your work, you dog of a Ponantais stoker!”

It was the *Moco* going his rounds. Jack went down without a word, ashamed of this humiliation inflicted in public.

As he placed his foot on the ladder leading to the stoke-hole, a long shiver shook the vessel, the steam that had been fuming since morning fell into a regular beat, the screw gained motion. They were off!

Down below, it was simply hell.

Loaded to the very muzzle, throwing out visible heat in scarlet gleams, the furnaces devoured the shovelfuls of



coal continually renewed by the stokers, whose faces, contorted under the action of these intense fires, became swelled out and apoplectic. The booming of the ocean seemed the roaring of the flames, the noise of the waves mingled with a crackling of sparks, gave the idea of an inextinguishable conflagration which only gained vigour from all the efforts made to put it out.

“That’s your place,” said the head stoker.

Jack placed himself in front of one of these flaming throats that seemed to surround him on all sides, apparently enlarged and multiplied by the first sensation of giddiness caused by the pitching of the vessel. This burning fire box must be kept in full activity, stirred with the rake, fresh fuel thrown on, ashes cleared out incessantly. What made the work all the more horrible was that, being unused to the sea, the violent vibrations of the screw, the chances of the vessel’s roll, made him stumble at every moment, and threw him towards the flames. He was obliged to cling to what he could, in order not to fall, seizing only to drop them immediately the white-hot objects by which he had tried to steady himself.

He worked however with all his courage ; but at the end of an hour of this burning torture, he felt himself blind, deaf, breathless, suffocated by the blood rushing to his head, his eyes dim and clouded beneath the singed lashes. He did what he saw the others do, and all dripping, rushed beneath the “wind sail,” a long canvas tube, through which falls as a torrent from the height of the deck a gust of outer air. Ah ! how delightful it was ! Almost immediately, a cape of ice fell upon his shoulders. This murderous draught of air had checked his breath, his very life.

“The flask !” he cried in a hoarse voice to the stoker, who had offered him drink already.

“There, comrade, I knew you would come to it.”

He swallowed a great draught. It was almost pure alcohol; but he was so cold, that, fierce as it was, it seemed to him as insipid and tasteless as water. When he had drunk, he experienced a great sense of interior well-being, of warmth communicated to all his nerves, to all his muscles, and this was exaggerated into sharp burning in the pit of the stomach. Then, to extinguish the fire that consumed him, he began to drink again. Fire outside, fire inside, flame upon flame, alcohol upon coal, it is thus henceforward he must live.

Now began a mad dream of drunkenness and torture which was to last three years—three sinister years, in which the days were all alike, the months confused and shuffled together, the seasons all alike in the uniform dog days of the stoke-hole. He traversed unknown zones, of which the names sounded bright, refreshing, songful. Italian or French names, the childish French of the colonies; but of all these fairy-like countries he saw neither the sapphire skies nor the emerald islands spread out as fertile nosegays on the phosphorescent waves. For him the sea had always the same dull roar, the fire the same violence. And the more lovely the country, the more terrible was the stoke-hole.

They put into flowery harbours, bounded by palm-tree forests, bananas with green plumes, purple hills, white huts propped up by bamboos; but for him everything was of the colour of coal. When, barefooted on the scorching quays, all coated over with melting tar, or the black juice of the sugar-cane, he had emptied his cinders, broken coal, shipped coal, he would fall into a sleep of exhaustion on the embankments, or bury himself in some low pot-house; embankments and pot-houses just like those of Nantes, hideous witnesses of his first

drunken bout. There he found other stokers, English Malay, Nubian, fierce brutes, mere stoking machines; and as they had nothing to say to each other, they drank. To begin with, all stokers must drink.

It is the only way to live.

And he drank!

In the night of this abyss, there was yet one spot of light: his mother. She held a place in the furthest corner of his lugubrious existence like a Madonna in the depths of some chapel, wherein all the tapers have been extinguished. Now that he had become a man, many mysterious sides of his long martyrdom were made clear to his understanding. His respect for Charlotte was changed into a tender pity; and he began to love her as one loves those for whom one suffers and expiates. Even in his deepest excesses, he never forgot the aim of his undertaking, and by a sort of instinct he saved his pay. All the lucidity of spirit left to his drink-dulled mind was directed to the thought that he was working for his mother.

In the meantime, the distance between them increased, not only by reason of the many leagues traversed, but above all by the vague oblivion in which time plunged the unhappy exile. Jack's letters grew more and more rare, as each one was dated from a little further off. Those of Charlotte, numerous and long-winded, awaited him at his halting places, but spoke of matters so totally foreign to his new situation, that he read them only for the sake of the far-off echo of the yet loving tenderness they contained. The letters dated from Etiolles described the ordinary episodes of d'Argenton's life. Later on, others, dated from Paris announced a change in their mode of life, a new home on the Quai des Augustins, very near the Institute. "We are in the very midst of an

intellectual centre," wrote Charlotte. "Monsieur d'Argenton, yielding to the solicitations of his friends, has decided to return to Paris, and to found a philosophical and literary Review. It will be a means of making known his works, so unjustly ignored, and also of gaining a great deal of money. But what a lot of trouble has to be taken! What journeys to authors and publishers! We have received a very interesting article from Monsieur Moronval. I also am busy helping him, poor dear. At this moment I am just finishing recopying the *Daughter of Faust*. You are very lucky, my child, to live far away from all this agitation. It makes Monsieur d'Argenton quite ill. You must be grown up, my Jack, by this time. Send me your photograph." Some time after this on putting in at Havannah, Jack found a voluminous packet addressed to him, "Jack de Barancy, stoker on board the *Cydnus*." It was the first number of—

### THE REVIEW OF THE RACES OF THE FUTURE.

Edited by the Vicomte A. D'ARGENTON.

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The stoker mechanically turned over the leaves of this collection of absurdities, grimed it with his hands, and marked it with black as he read on. And all at once, seeing the names of all his executioners assembled together upon the smooth and daintily coloured cover,

a shadow of proud anger awoke within him. He experienced a thrill of indignation and rage, and from the depths of his lair he cried, shaking his fist as if they could see and hear him: "Ah, wretches, wretches, look what you have made me!" But it was only a lightning flash. The stoke-hole and alcohol soon suppressed this moment of revolt, and the atonic condition into which the unhappy creature sank deeper day by day, soon covered it under the grey mantle of monotony which overspread his life, as the sand of the desert, heaped grain by grain over lost caravans, envelops travellers, guides, and horses in the same fatal shroud, though still leaving them the outlines of living forms.

Strange to say, as his intellect withered and his will lost its power, his body, excited, sustained and fed by continual stimulants, seemed to become more vigorous. His step remained as firm, his strength at work equally great during drunkenness as in a normal state; so much had he become accustomed to the poison, and hardened against all its exterior effects; even his face, pale and distorted, was impenetrable, stiffened by the effort of the man who compels his drunkenness to walk upright and condemns it to silence. Methodical at his work, inured to what was terrible in it, he bore with the same indifference the long and uniform days of the voyage, and the hours of storm, those battles with the sea that are so appalling in the stoke hole, when leaks are sprung, when "blasts of flame" roar forth and the burning coal rolls across the floor. For him these terrible moments were confused with the ordinary dreams of his sleep, the visions of delirium, the moving and seething nightmares that disturb the sleep of drunkards.

Was it not in one of these dreams that occurred that terrible concussion, which shook the whole *Cydnus*, one

night when the poor stoker was sleeping? That straight hard blow on the steamer's side, that fearful din followed by a sound of cracking and breaking, of water rushing in, of volumes of sea falling in cataracts and running away in slender streamlets, those hurried steps, electric bells ringing answers to each other, alarm, cries, and over all the fatal stoppage of the screw, leaving the vessel abandoned to the silent tossing of her roll; was not all this a dream? His comrades call him, shake him: "Jack! Jack!" He rushes out half naked. In the engine-room there are already two feet of water. The compass is broken, the lamps extinguished, the dials overturned. They speak to each other, feel for each other in darkness and mud. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"An American vessel has run into us. We are going down. Save yourselves as best you can."

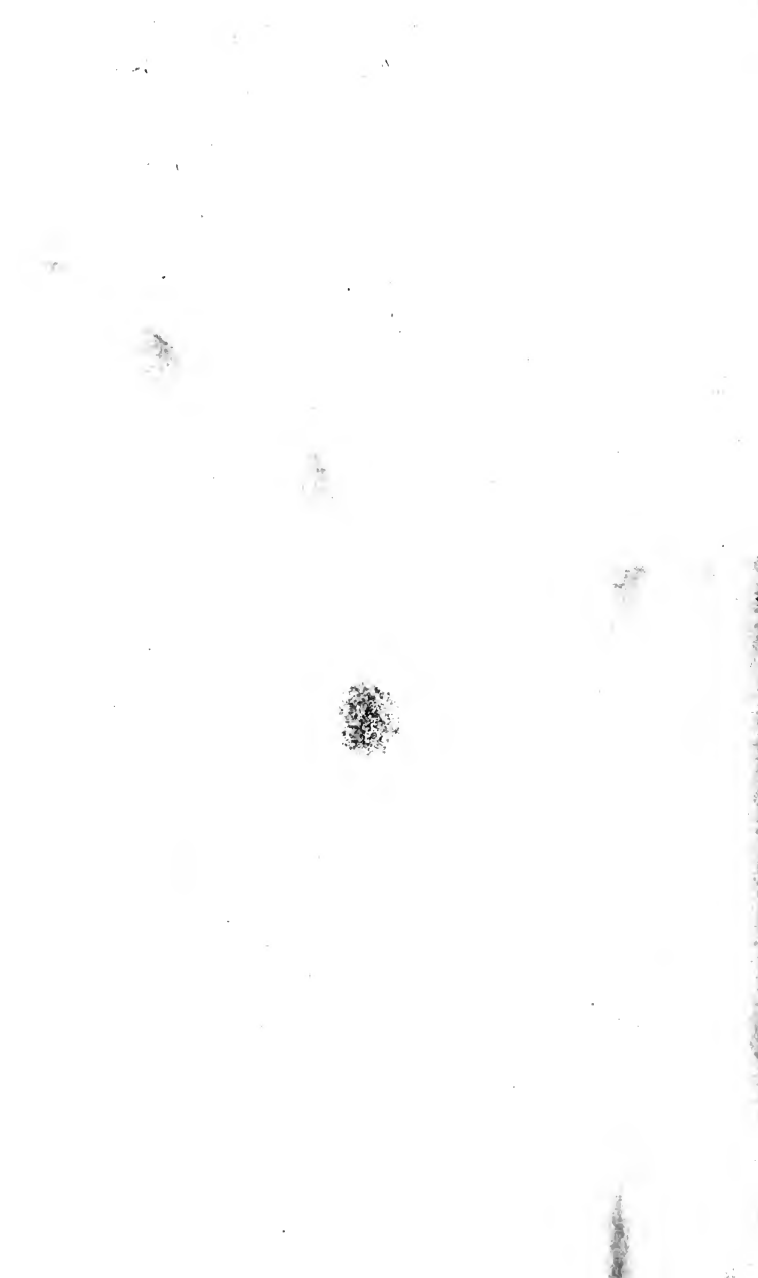
But at the top of the narrow ladder towards which engineers and stokers are rushing, appears the *Moco*, erect, and revolver in hand.

"The first one who comes out of this I'll put a bullet through his head. To the stoke-hole, by God, and stoke your hardest. Land is not far off. We may reach it yet."

Every man returns to his post, and works with the fury of despair. In the stoke-hole it is terrible. The furnaces, charged up to bursting point, send back a cloud of damp smoke, blinding, stinking, and suffocating, which smothers the men, while the water, continually creeping higher notwithstanding the pumps, freezes their every limb. Oh, how happy are those who are going to meet death up there on the deck, in the open air! Here is death in its blackest shape, between two great walls of cast iron—a death resembling a suicide.

All is over. The pumps work no longer. The fires are out. The water is up to the stokers' shoulders, and this time it is the *Moco* himself who shouts in a voice of thunder, "Run for your lives, my lads!"







IX.

THE RETURN.



A great shadow, tottering against the wall, slowly drags itself along.



ON the Quai des Augustins, a narrow peaceful-looking quay, bordered on one side by booksellers' shops and on the other by a row of second-hand book-stalls, stands an old house of the last century with heavy arched portals in which was installed the office of the *Review of the Races of the Future*.

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It was not at haphazard that this retired quarter of Paris had been chosen for the Review. It is customary in Paris to start newspapers and all such publications in the *arrondissement* that best suits each one. In the heart of the city, near the great boulevards, the magazines and, fashionable papers are exposed in their tinted covers like the latest fashion materials. In the Quartier Latin the little daily papers and illustrated ballads alternate with the learned fronts of medical publications. But the compact serious Reviews—those which have an end in view—choose the quiet claustral streets where noisy Paris will leave them in peace to their laborious lucubrations.

The Races of the Future, a humanitarian and independent Review, had admirably chosen its place on this quay pervaded by the smell of old books, "and in the neighbourhood of the Institute," as Charlotte said. The house itself with its old blackened balconies, its worm-eaten frontal, its broad staircase and carved bannisters all sufficiently mouldy and dismal, was well suited to the spirit of the Review. What was less in keeping, however, was the physiognomy and air of its editors.

During the last six months, from the day the *Future Races* had been founded, the terrified *concierge* of the house had seen its threshold crossed by the foulest, strangest, most lamentable looking crowd of penny-a-liners that ever the slums of literature produced. "We see even negroes, Chinamen," the unhappy Cerberus confided to his colleagues of the Quai des Augustins, and no doubt he meant Moronval, one of the most assiduous members of the Review, who was invariably escorted by one of his "*pays chauds*." But Moronval was not the only oddity who haunted the venerable house which had now become the rendezvous of all the literary Failures of Paris and the provinces—these disappointed creatures

who roam through life with voluminous manuscripts in the scanty pockets of their threadbare coats.

A Failure who founds a Review—a Review with capital and shareholders—fancy, what a prize! It is true that the shareholders were few and far between. Up to this day only two had been found—d'Argenton naturally, and, our friend Jack. Don't laugh; yes, Jack was a shareholder of the *Review of the Races of the Future*. He was down on the books for ten thousand francs (four hundred pounds), the ten thousand francs of "*Bon Ami*." Charlotte had felt some scruple at disposing in such a manner of the sum she was to hand over to her son at his majority, but she had given in to d'Argenton's arguments:

"Come! Do try to understand. It is a magnificent investment. Figures are figures. Consider the price that the shares of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* have attained. Is there a better investment than that? I don't say that we shall at once realize such profits as those. But if we only make a quarter of them, it would be a far better investment than the Funds or railway shares. I have not hesitated to draw out my own money to put it in this affair."

With the knowledge she had of the stinginess of her poet, Charlotte could make no further objection.

In six months d'Argenton had sacrificed more than thirty thousand francs (twelve hundred pounds) for the expenses of the office, rent and editors, not to speak of the advances of money he had made for work not yet handed in. At the present time nothing remained over and above this first outlay, and he now saw himself compelled to make a new call upon his shareholders, as he said; for he had invented this pretext of shareholders to shield himself from borrowers.

The fact was, that in addition to the total absence of

profits, the expenses were very heavy. Besides the office of the Review, the poet had rented on the fourth story of the same house, a large and handsome apartment for himself, with a balcony from which the view spread over the wondrous horizon of the Cité, the Seine, Notre Dame, domes, steeples : bridges with numberless carriages rolling over them, and boats sailing under their arches. Here, at least, he felt that he could live and breathe. How different from that remote little corner of Les Aulnettes, where, in the summer, the passage of a bumble bee that happened to cross the poet's study daily, at about three o'clock, was anxiously awaited as the crowning event of the day. It was impossible to work in such an atmosphere of lethargy. And to think that he had had the courage to shut himself up there for six years ! And what had been the consequence ? He had taken six years to write his *Daughter of Faust*, while here in Paris since his arrival, thanks to the intellectual movement which surrounded him, he had begun ever so many essays, leading articles and stories.

Charlotte, on her side, took her share of the feverish activity of her artist. Still young and fresh, she superintended her house and table ; by no means a small affair with the numberless guests who daily assembled at her board. She also took her part in the literary work.

To facilitate his digestion the poet had adopted the habit of dictating instead of writing, and, as Charlotte wrote a good clear hand, she became his secretary. In the evening, when they dined alone, he would dictate to her for an hour while he paced the room. In the somnolent old house, his steps resounded while his solemn voice was answered by another, soft, gentle and admiring, which seemed to make the responses to the officiating pontiff.

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“There is our author composing,” the *concierge* would respectfully say.

On the evening we again meet with the d'Argenton couple, they are in their charming little sitting-room which is pervaded by the odour of green tea and Spanish cigarettes. Charlotte is preparing her writing table, setting out her newest inkstand, an ivory penholder, gold dust, and fine large sheets of white paper with broad margins for the corrections. A useless precaution, for the poet never makes a correction—it comes just as it chances, in one inspiration, and is never touched up. But the sheets look better with a margin, and when her poet is in question Charlotte's pride is all alive.

This evening d'Argenton is in full swing; he feels fit to dictate all night, and thinks he will take advantage of the opportunity to write a sentimental tale destined to entice his subscribers to renew their subscriptions. He twirls his moustache, which is now turning a little grey; he raises his great forehead, heightened by the loss of his hair; he awaits inspiration! On the other hand Charlotte, by a contrast which is frequent in a loving couple, is in low spirits. There seems to be a cloud over her bright eyes. She is pale and absent-minded, though ever docile: for, in spite of her evident fatigue, she dips her pen in the ink, her little finger delicately poised in the air, like a kitten afraid of soiling its paws.

“Come, Lolotte, are you ready? We begin with the first chapter. Have you written ‘Chapter the first’?”

“Chapter the first,” repeats Charlotte, in a sad tone.

The poet looks at her irritably, then begins with the evident intention of ignoring her sadness.

“*In a remote valley of the Pyrenees—of those lovely Pyrenees teeming with legends—of those lovely Pyrenees teeming with legends—*”

He is delighted with this repetition of his phrase. He repeats it over and over again, complacently, modulating his voice, then at last he turns to Charlotte :

"You have written '*teeming with legends*'?"

She tries to repeat "*te-teeming with*," but she stops, her voice broken by sobs.

Charlotte weeps. She has vainly struggled against her tears, bitten her penholder, tight shut her lips. It will burst out. She cries and cries.

"There, now," says d'Argenton, dumbfounded. "Just my luck! The very day I am in such a good vein. What is the matter,—come! Is it that news about the *Cydnu*? But don't you know it is nothing but a rumour? We all know what the newspapers are—how they lay hold of anything to fill their columns. To be without news of a ship is a thing of daily occurrence. Besides, Hirsch was to have called at the office of the Company to-day. He will be here presently and will tell you what he has learned. It will be time enough then to make yourself unhappy."

He speaks to her in a disdainful and drily condescending tone, as one would speak to the weak, to children, to lunatics or invalids. Is she not a little of all these? Then when he has calmed her :

"Where did we leave off? I have lost the thread. Read over all I have dictated—all!"

"*In a remote valley of the Pyrenees—of those lovely Pyrenees teeming with legends—*"

"Go on."

She vainly turns and returns the page, shakes the new sheets of paper :

"That's all," she says at last.

D'Argenton is greatly surprised; he thought there was ever so much more. This is always what happens when



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he dictates. The prodigious advance that his thought takes upon its expression misleads him. He fancies he has realized and stated what is still a mere dream, an embryo in his brain ; and when he has only made a few grandiloquent gestures, stammered out a few words, he remains aghast at the little he has produced, the disproportion between the dream and its reality. It is the disenchantment of Don Quixote when he thought himself in the empyrean and mistook the blowing of scullions and kitchen bellows for the free air of heaven, and the rocking of the wooden horse he was seated on for the shock of a great fall.

D'Argenton also thought himself started, carried up, soaring on high. What ! all these feverish thrills, all these attitudes, all this over-excitement, these pacings up and down, tossings of hair—all this to produce two miserable lines : "*In a remote valley of the Pyrenees—those lovely Pyrenees,*" &c. It is always so.

He is furious, for he feels he is ridiculous.

"It's all your fault," he says to Charlotte. "It's an easy matter, is it not, to work opposite a person who is crying all the time? Really it is dreadful. A whole world of conceptions, of ideas, and all for nothing—for ever nothing ! And the time passes and the years slip by, and one's place is taken. Are you not aware, unhappy woman, how small a thing is sufficient to put inspiration to flight ? Oh ! the torture of always knocking one's head against some stupid reality. I who to compose, would need to live in a crystal tower a thousand feet above the futilities of life, to fall a prey to caprice, childishness, disorder and noise."

He stamps his feet, violently strikes the table with his fist, while Charlotte, who has not wept enough to ease her heavy heart, picks up, with her tears still falling, the pens,

pen-wiper, pen-holder, and all her writing gear lying scattered on the carpet.

The arrival of Doctor Hirsch puts an end to this uncomfortable scene, which though unpleasant is so habitual that it is familiar to every atom of the house, so much so, indeed, that as soon as the storm is over and the anger abated, all falls back into the ordinary groove and the usual harmony and quiet of the home is quickly restored. The Doctor is not alone. Labassindre accompanies him, and they both make their entry with an air of mysterious and unwonted gravity. The singer particularly, accustomed to stage effects has a way of tightening his lips, of raising his chin which evidently signifies, "I know something of the greatest importance, but nothing will induce me to reveal it."

D'Argenton, who is still trembling with rage, does not at once understand the meaning of these telling shakes of the hand that his friends mutely lavish upon him. A word from Charlotte brings him to the point.

"Well, Monsieur Hirsch?" she says, running up to the fanciful doctor.

"Always the same answer, madame. No news."

But while he says to Charlotte "no news," his eyes, staring inordinately through his goggle-eyed spectacles, tell d'Argenton that it is a dreadful lie—that there is news, terrible news.

"And what do the clerks of the company think? What do they say?" asks the mother with a longing to know and a dread of hearing the truth from these grimacing faces.

"Dear me! madame—*beûh! beûh!*"

While Labassindre gets entangled in a long rambling phrase,—half reassuring and yet implying doubt, Hirsch, by dint of twisting his mouth according to the Decostère

method, has succeeded in giving the poet the configuration of the following words: "*Cydnus* gone down, all lives lost. Collision in the open sea, neighbourhood of Cape Verde; horrible."

D'Argenton's heavy moustache quivers, but that is all. On this pallid face, on those flat and correct features—not a muscle of which has moved—it would be difficult to read the impression caused by this lugubrious *dénouement* whether triumph carries the day or tardy remorse. Perhaps both sentiments are struggling on the immovable countenance which betrays neither.

The poet feels only that he must go out into the open air to evaporate the agitation that shakes him at this great news.

"I have worked a great deal," he says seriously to his friends. "I must take a little air. Let us go out for a turn."

"Yes, that is right," says Charlotte. "Go out a little, it will do you good."

Charlotte, who is always glad to keep her artist with her at home, because she fancies all the ladies of the Faubourg St. Germain are informed of his return and ready each in turn to "drink his heart's blood," is on this evening exceptionally glad to see him go out and to remain alone with her thoughts. She will be free to weep in peace, without anyone to proffer useless consolation; she will give herself over entirely to her anxiety, to the terrible forebodings she dare not even speak of for fear of the brutal reassuring she dreads. This is why even the presence of her servant is too much, and why instead of gossiping with her as she usually does when Monsieur goes out, she sends her up to bed.

"Madame wishes to remain alone? Is not madame afraid? The wind is moaning so dismally out there on the balcony."

“No, leave me, I am not afraid.”

At last she remains alone and can sit silently musing without being interrupted by the voice of her tyrant in her ears: “What are you thinking of?” She is thinking of her Jack of course! “What else?” Ever since she read that terrible line in the paper: *We are without news of the Cydnus*, the image of her child pursues her, maddens her, leaves her not for an instant. In the day-time the all-absorbing egotism of her poet forces her away from her torment, but at night she cannot sleep. She listens with unnatural terror to the howling of the wind. At the corner of the quay where they live it always blows from one quarter or another, irritated or plaintive; it shakes the old wainscoting, it rattles against the panes, it bangs the unfastened shutters; but whether it whispers or howls it has meaning words for her, the meaning words that pale the cheek of sailors’ wives and mothers.

Yes, this blast of tempest comes from afar; it comes with a rush, and has seen many a terrific adventure. On its great wings, which like a hunted bird it dashes against all it encounters on its way, it bears tidings and cries of distress and carries them all with equal rapidity. Comic and tragic in turn, in the same minute it will tear down the sail of a boat, put out a candle, raise a mantilla, herald a storm, spread a fire; these are the stories it tells and which give its voice so many intonations, joyous or lamentable

To-night its story is sinister. It runs along the balcony, shakes the windows, whistles through the doors. It will come in. It has pressing news to give this mother; the clamouring it makes at the windows, as it shakes its dripping wings, resounds like a call and a warning. The voice of the clocks in the neighbourhood, the distant

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whistle of the railway, take in her ears the same plaintive, reiterated, persecuting accent. She can guess what the wind has to tell her. It has seen the wide ocean—for it is everywhere at the same time; it has seen a great ship struggling against the waves; it has seen the ship with her sides torn open, lose her masts, and sink into the abyss alive with stretched-out arms, wild and pallid faces, mad eyes glaring through streaming locks, and cries of farewell mingling with sobs and curses hurled forth on the threshold of death. Her hallucination is such that she fancies she hears amid the rumours of the distant wreck a vague plaint barely articulate :

“Mother!”

No, it is an illusion, a phantasy of her anxious brain.

“Mother!”

This time the plaint seems louder; but no, it is impossible. Her ears are tingling surely. God! is she going mad? To escape from the besetting thought, Charlotte gets up, walks about the room. Ah! now there can be no doubt some one has called; it comes from the stairs. She runs and opens the door.

The gas is out, and the light she holds throws on the stairs the shadow of the open-worked banisters. Nothing, noone. And still she is sure she heard something.

She must look again. She leans over, raising the light on high. A soft smothered sound, something between a laugh and a sob, rises from the stairs, while a great shadow tottering against the wall, slowly drags itself along.

“Who is there?” she cries with so wild a hope, that fear is banished.

“It is I, mother. Oh yes! I see you,” answers a very weak and hoarse voice.

She quickly runs down a few steps. It is he, it is her

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Jack, this great wounded workman leaning on two crutches, so overcome, so trembling at the idea of seeing his mother once more, that he is obliged to stop half-way and utter a cry of distress. This is what she has made of her child.

Not a word, not a cry, not even a caress. They are there face to face ; and weep as they gaze at each other.

There is a certain ridiculous fatality that clings to some individuals, making all their manifestations useless or out of harmony. D'Argenton, the king of the "Failures," seemed destined to fail in all his intended effects. He had resolved, after having lengthily consulted his friends, to announce the fatal news to Charlotte that evening on his return home—to make an end of it, and meet the first outburst of her grief by a few solemn words adapted to the circumstances. The very way in which he turned the key in the lock foreboded the gravity of what he was going to impart. But what was his surprise to find, at this late hour, lights in the drawing-room, Charlotte still up, and, near the fire the remains of a meal eaten in haste and evidently improvised in the emotion of a departure or an arrival?

She went up to him still fluttering with emotion :

"Hush ! don't make a noise. He is there, he is asleep. Oh ! how happy I am."

"Who ? what ?"

"Jack. He has been shipwrecked. He is wounded. His ship is lost. He has escaped by a miracle. He comes from Rio Janeiro, where he spent two months at the hospital."

D'Argenton smiled a sickly smile, which might at a pinch have been taken for a sign of satisfaction.

To do him justice it must be said that he took the thing

in quite a paternal way and was the first to declare that Jack should remain with them until he should have completely recovered his strength. In conscience he could do no less for his principal, his only shareholder. Ten thousand francs worth of shares, surely deserved some consideration.

When the first emotion had calmed down, and the first few days had passed, Charlotte and her poet resumed their ordinary course of life with only the addition of the poor cripple's presence whose two legs, scalded by the explosion of a boiler, took a long time to heal. With his blue flannel pea-jacket, his blackened skin, his swollen sun-burnt features, against which his fair moustache stood out with a reddish tint, his inflamed eyes and scorched eye-lashes, his flushed complexion and sunken cheeks, the grievous air of discouragement which pervaded his whole person and enveloped him in the torpor peculiar to great catastrophes, the godson of Lord Peambock, the adored Jack (with a K) of Ida de Barancy dragged himself from chair to chair to the great irritation of d'Argenton and still greater shame of his mother.

Whenever a stranger entered the house, when a surprised and curious look fell upon the unemployed workman whose dress, air and language contrasted so strangely with the quiet luxury that surrounded him, she would eagerly say: "This is my son. Allow me to introduce my son. He has been very ill," just like those mothers of infirm children who hurriedly assert their maternity in order to leave no time for the pitying smile of compassion they dread. But if she winced at the condition she saw her son reduced to, if she blushed at his vulgar, almost coarse manners, at his way of holding himself at table, which spoke of drunken habits, and the gluttony of the working classes; she suffered far more from the tone of

contempt in which the *habitués* of the house affected to address her child.

Jack had found all his former acquaintances of the Gymnase, all the Failures of "*Parva domus*," assembled here ; owning a few more years, with fewer teeth and scantier hair, but immovable as to their social positions, and still faithfully treading their treadmill like the brave Failures they were. They assembled every day in the office of the Review to discuss the contents of the next number, and twice a week they had a grand dinner in the apartment of the fourth story. D'Argenton, who could not do without an admiring circle around him, disguised his own weakness to himself with the big sounding words of which he had the secret :

"We must form a group, squeeze together, shoulder to shoulder."

And they did squeeze with a vengeance ! They squeezed him till they nearly smothered him. In the whole group, the man, whose pointed elbows he felt most was Evariste Moronval, the secretary of the *Review of the Races of the Future*. It was he who first had had the idea of founding the Review, and to him it owed its humanitarian and palingenestic title. He corrected the proofs, superintended the paging, revised the articles and tales ; in brief by his glowing words he kept up the failing courage of the director, who was disposed to quail before the ever increasing expenses of the magazine and the coldness of its subscribers.

For these numerous services the mulatto received a very small salary, but he increased it by various additions of his own, supplementary articles paid apart, and continual loans. The Gymnase Moronval had failed long since ; but its director had not entirely given up educating the little "*pays chauds*" and he was always accompanied,

in his goings to and fro, by the two last products of his singular system of culture.

One of them was a Japanese prince, a young man of indefinite age somewhere between fifteen and fifty. Stripped of his long Japanese dress, he looked ridiculously small and spare, and with his very small hat and very small cane, had exactly the air of a little yellow clay figure fallen from a lady's what-not on to the Parisian pavement.

The other, a big fellow whose eyes and forehead alone were visible in the puffed and swollen face hidden under a black curly beard, which looked like ebony shavings, recalled old and vague souvenirs to Jack, who soon recognized his old friend Saïd by the cigar-ends which he did not fail to offer him at one of their first meetings.

The education of this unfortunate young man had been finished long ago; but his parents had left him with Moronval to be initiated into the mysteries of the best society. With the exception of Saïd, all the *habitués* of the Review and the semi-weekly dinners affected towards Jack a tone of patronising and familiar condescension. He might have been taken for some poor devil of a workman admitted by favour to the table of his employer.

He had remained "Monsieur Jack" for only one person—the good, kind Madame Moronval-Decostère, ever the same, with her great solemn shiny forehead, and her little black dress which though less solemn was still more shiny. Moreover, it was perfectly indifferent to Jack whether he was called "Monsieur Jack" or "old fellow" or "my man" or "my lad." Contempt, indifference, friendliness were all the same to this poor nondescript who stood apart, his pipe in his mouth, stupified and half asleep as he listened, without hearing, to the literary clamour which had worried his childhood.

His two months at the hospital, his three years in the

stokehole, and the habit of drinking which had been its fatal consequence, the terrible convulsion of the end had thrown him into a state of stupor and fatigue which made him dread to speak or move ; he longed for the quiet of silence in which should be extinguished the furies of the sea and the roar of engines still booming in his ears like the echo of the ocean resounding in a shell.

"He is brutified," d'Argenton would often say.

But no, he was not that, he was silent, somnolent, devoid of energy or will, absorbed in the enjoyment of the immobility of the soil and the stillness of the air. He regained a little life only when alone with his mother on the rare afternoons when the poet was away. Then he would draw close up to her and revive in the joyousness of her bird-like chatter and her tenderness. Only he preferred listening to her rather than speaking himself. Her voice was a delicious murmur in his ears, like that of the bees in summer, in the honey season.

One day when they were alone, he suddenly woke from his long torpor and said slowly, very slowly to Charlotte :

"When I was a child I must have made a long voyage, did I not?"

She looked at him embarrassed for a moment. It was the first time he had ever questioned her about the past.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because the first time I set foot upon a steamer, three years ago, I experienced a singular sensation. It seemed to me that all I saw I had seen before. The day-light streaming through the portholes, the little stairs bound with brass, all struck me as in the light of a souvenir. I fancied that when a little fellow I had played and fallen on those stairs. One has those fancies in dreams."

She looked anxiously round to assure herself that they were alone.

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"It is not a dream you had, my Jack. You were three years old when we left Algeria. Your father had died suddenly and we were going back to Touraine."

"Ah! my father died in Algeria?"

"Yes," she whispered as she bent her head.

"What was my father's name?"

She hesitated, for she was very much upset; she was not prepared for this sudden curiosity of his; and still, however awkward the conversation might be, she could not refuse to reveal the name of his father to this youth of twenty who was now of an age to hear and understand everything.

"He bore one of the greatest names of France, my child, a name you and I would bear now if an unforeseen and terrible catastrophe had not arrested him at the very moment he was about to repair his fault. Oh! we were very young when we first met. I remember it was at a wild boar hunt in the gorges of Chiffa. I must tell you that I had at that time a passion for hunting. I even remember that I rode a little Arab horse, named Soliman, a perfect little devil."

She was started, poor giddy-head, off at a mad gallop on her Arab horse called Soliman, across this visionary country which she peopled with all the Lord Peambocks, all the Singapoore Rajahs of her dazzling imagination.

Jack did not make an effort to interrupt her; he knew it was useless. But when she stopped to take breath, suffocated by the whirlwind and rapidity of her wild career, he took advantage of the short pause to return to his first question and arrest by a matter-of-fact word, the giddy brain so prompt to start away.

"What was my father's name?" he repeated.

Oh! the startled glance of those light eyes. She had quite forgotten what they were speaking of.

Still breathless with her long story, she answered quickly:

"His name was the Marquis de l'Epan, major in the third regiment of Hussars."

Jack had not evidently, on the subject of the rights and prerogatives of the nobility the same illusions as his mother,—for he learned the secret of his illustrious birth with the greatest calm. After all his father having been a Marquis did not prevent him from being a stoker and a very bad stoker too, as broken down, as useless as the boiler of the *Cydnus* itself now lying at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean under six hundred fathoms of water. His father's name having been illustrious did not prevent him from being plain Jack, did not prevent him from being a stray waif rolled about by the ever changing flood-tide of life. Moreover, he was told that his father was dead, and this awakening of unknown sentiment that Jack had experienced for a moment, having nothing to lay hold upon, soon subsided now that his curiosity was satisfied, and disappeared like all the rest in the torpor of his faculties.

"Come now, Charlotte. We must decide upon something for this fellow. He cannot remain here for ever doing nothing. His legs are cured. He eats like a wolf. He coughs a little still, but Hirsch says he will cough all his life. He really must make up his mind to do something, If stoking is too hard work for him why should he not try railway-engine driving? Labassindre says it is very well paid."

To these observations of her poet, Charlotte objected that Jack was still very weak, very languid:

"If you only saw how hard he breathes when he mounts our four stories, how thin he is. He is so restless too at night. Why should you not employ him on the Review until he gets stronger?"

“Well, I will try him,” said he, “I will consult Moronval.”

Moronval was disposed to try him also, but it turned out an unfortunate attempt. For a few days Jack filled the place of office-boy. He carried the proofs to the printers, folded the magazines, gummed the wrappers. They made him do everything except sweep the two rooms, and this, for decency's sake, they left to the *concierge* whose prerogative it was.

Jack fulfilled these various functions with his habitual impassibility, supporting at the same time the contemptuous allusions of Moronval, who had many a spite to satisfy, and the cold anger of d'Argenton, whose ill temper constantly increased as the subscribers became fewer. The obstinacy of those subscribers was really amazing. On the magnificent register, bound in green cloth, on which their names ought to have figured, only a stray one appeared on the first page, lost like a nutshell on the vast desert ocean: “*Monsieur le Comte de —— chateau de ——, Mettray, near Tours.*” It was Charlotte who had furnished this one.

The absence of profits did not prevent the expenses from going on, nor the contributors from presenting themselves on the fifth of every month, to be paid for the work they had handed in, and for a little more in advance. Moronval was more insatiable than any one. When he did not go himself he would send his wife, or Saïd, or even the Japanese *prince*. D'Argenton was furious, but he dared not refuse. His vanity was so greedy and the mulatto's pockets were so full of sweets for its longing palate. However, when the staff assembled, the director did not fail to bewail himself and, in order to oppose any attempt on their part to follow Moronval's example, he would put forward his ever-the-same, insuperable argument:

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“My committee of shareholders will not hear of it.” And the committee of shareholders stood there in the corner composed of one single member, unaware of his dignity, occupied in pasting wrappers with a brush and a large pot of paste. As the Review had only one subscriber, “*Bon Ami*,” so it had but one shareholder, Jack, with the money of “*Bon Ami*.”

Neither Jack nor anyone else knew this, but d’Argenton knew it well, and it caused in him a shamed embarrassment in regard of the youth which made him hate Jack again as he had done of old.

At the end of a week the office boy was declared to be utterly inefficient.

“He is perfectly useless ; instead of being a help he is only a trouble to every one.”

“But I assure you, dear, he does all he can.”

Charlotte was more courageous in defending him since the great anxiety she had passed through.

“Well, what will you have ? I tell you he bothers me. How shall I explain it ? He is not in his proper sphere with us. Do you not see how he behaves himself at dinner, with his legs apart, seated a mile away from the table ; how he falls asleep over his plate ? Then that great fellow constantly at your side ages you, my dear. Besides he has deplorable habits. He drinks, I assure you he drinks. He brings home the odours of the public-house. After all, he is a workman.”

She bent her head and wept. She had noticed that he drank, but whose fault was it ? Had they not themselves pushed him into the abyss ?

“Let me see. Charlotte, I have an idea. Since he is too weak to set to work again, let us send him to Etioilles to recover his strength. He will remain a while in the good country air, and will perhaps help us to underlet

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'*Parva domus*,' which remains on our shoulders with a ten years' lease. We will send him a little money, all he will need. It will do him good."

She threw her arms around his neck in a transport of gratitude :

"Oh! you are indeed the best of men."

And it was at once agreed that she should go off next day to settle her son at Les Aulnettes.

They reached it on one of those deliciously soft and glowing mornings in autumn which seem to be summer appeased and relieved of its heavy burning heat. Not a ruffle in the air, only the songs of birds, the crackling of the fallen leaves and an odour of ripeness, of dry hay, of scorched heather, of fruit ready to be gathered. The paths in the slightly thinning woods, covered with bright yellow flowers, were less thickly shaded under the relenting sun, and in velvet silence joined the glades. Jack recognized them all. In setting foot on them again he seemed to regain possession of a few happy, unforgotten years of his childhood during which, in spite of his cruel position, he had felt his whole being expand in the kind freedom of Nature. Nature herself seemed to recognize him also, to call him, to welcome him. In the emotion of these souvenirs and his own weakness he fancied he heard a soft and comforting voice : "Come to me, poor child—come to my calm and evenly beating heart. I will clasp you, I will take care of you. I have a balm for every wound, and he who confides himself to me is already cured."

Charlotte left her son early that morning, and, for the first time, the little house with its open windows breathing in the soft air, and the hum of the garden in which fruit and flowers mingled in the autumn season—the little house which Jack ran over from room to room, bending

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low to seek in every corner the crumbs of his vanished childhood—deserved its name, and, without a tinge of irony, could display the motto over its door:

Small house, great repose.

END OF PART THE SECOND.

PART THE THIRD.

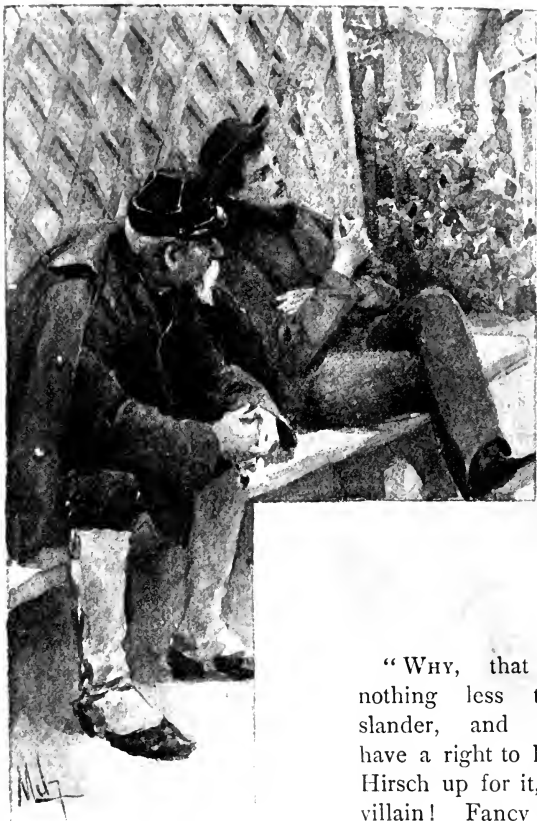


I.

CÉCILE.



When the prescription had been made up, the peasant woman withdrew, with many curtsies.



“WHY, that is nothing less than slander, and you have a right to have Hirsch up for it, the villain! Fancy his having left me for five years under the impression that my friend Jack was a

thief! What a blackguard! He came to see us on purpose to tell us this piece of news; he might have taken the trouble to return and deny it, when your

innocence was recognized, proclaimed and testified to in such flattering and eloquent terms. Come, show me your certificate again."

"Here it is, Monsieur Rivals."

"It is splendid. It would have been difficult to make more handsome amends for an involuntary wrong. That manager was a good man. Ah! I am indeed pleased. I had often been worried at the idea that my pupil had become a knave. And to think that if I had not met you by chance at the Archambaulds, I might have remained under this impression for many a day!"

It was, in fact, in the gamekeeper's little house that Monsieur Rivals had met his former friend once more.

During the ten days that Jack had been inhabiting Les Aulnettes he had lived like a contemplative Brahmin, immersed in the grand silence of Nature, breathing in the last fine summer days, filling himself as it were, with the subsiding sunlight, and only leaving the house to plunge into the living calm of the forest. The trees gave him their strength, the earth its vigour, and at times, as he shook his head to arouse his brain, he seemed to lose somewhat of his invalid and convict-like appearance under the deep, delicate, and pure sky, through the tranquil autumnal rays of which space seemed infinite.

The only human beings he saw were the Archambaulds, of whom he had retained a kindly recollection. The woman reminded him of his mother, whom she had so faithfully and affectionately served; the man, a kind giant, silent and shy, absorbed like a faun in the vegetation of the woods, evoked within him the recollection of a whole past of delightful and invigorating rambles. Between these two recluses he lived his childhood over again. The woman bought him bread and provisions, and often, when he felt too idle to return home, he would stay at

their house, and cook some light repast in the ashes of their hearth. He would remain there, seated on the bench in front of the door smoking his pipe by the side of the keeper. These people never questioned him. Only sometimes, as he looked at the bright patches on his cheekbones, and saw how desperately thin he was, old Archambault would sadly shake his head, as when he watched his beloved beech groves devastated by the weevils.

That day, when he reached his friends' house, Jack had found the husband in bed, with a violent attack of muscular rheumatism, such as two or three times a year, laid this Colossus low, casting him down like a tree struck by lightning. Standing by the bedside was a short man, bareheaded with a fine white mane all ruffled, and dressed in a long coat, the pockets of which, crammed full of books and pamphlets, beat against his legs. It was Monsieur Rivals.

Their interview was at first rather an embarrassed one. Jack felt ashamed on finding himself brought face to face with the old doctor, whose sinister predictions he well remembered. Monsieur Rivals, attributing his awkwardness to the consciousness of his theft, remained very stiff. But the weak state of the big fellow nevertheless touched him. They went out together and returned on foot through the little green forest paths talking as they went along; and from path to path, from one vague detail to another more precise, they reached at one and the same time the limit of the wood and a thorough understanding of their mutual misconception.

Monsieur Rivals was triumphant, and never wearied of reading and re-reading the certificate in which the manager had proclaimed the error of the accusation.

“Well! now that you are settled in the country, I hope

we are going to see a good deal of you. In the first place it is almost indispensable. They have sent you into the woods, like a horse turned out to grass; but that is not sufficient. You require care, great care, especially at the present time of the year. Etiolles is not Nice, remember! You know how fond you were formerly of our house. It has remained the same. There is only my poor wife, who is gone, alas! She died four years ago—died of grief, and despair; for since our misfortune she had never really looked up. Luckily, I had the ‘little one’ to fill her place, for I do not know what would have become of me. Cécile keeps the books, tidies the surgery. She will be pleased to see you. Well, when will you come?”

Jack hesitated for a moment. And as though understanding his thought, Monsieur Rivals added with a laugh:

“You know, it won’t be necessary to bring her your certificate to be sure of an affectionate welcome. I never told her or the mother anything about all that. It would have made them too unhappy. There never was a shadow between you. You can come without fear. Well, the weather is rather too cold for you to dine with us to-day. The fog is bad for you. But I shall expect you to-morrow morning for lunch. Nothing is changed, we lunch just as in former days, at twelve—or at two o’clock, or at three, according to my visits. It is even worse, if anything, for my tiresome horse is growing old, has become even more dawdling and obstinate. We quarrel every day. There, now you are at home, go in quickly. To-morrow, without fail. Don’t forget, or I shall have to come and fetch you.”

As he closed the door, half blocked up by creepers, Jack felt a peculiar impression. It seemed to him as though he were returning from one of those long drives

he used to take, seated between the Doctor and his little friend, and that he would find his mother laying the table with the keeper's wife, while HE was at work up in the turret. The illusion was completed, by the sight of d'Argenton's bust, which had been considered too cumbersome to take to Paris, and which, though rusty and neglected, continued to lord it over the lawn, casting its changing shadow around it, like the needle of a sundial.

He spent the evening seated by the side of the chimney, in front of a faggot fire, for the stokehole had made him chilly. And as of old, when he returned from those delightful expeditions in the open country, the memories he brought back with him prevented his feeling the oppressive sadness and tyranny that ruled the whole household; so now, on this evening, his meeting with Monsieur Rivals, Cécile's name often repeated, had put into his heart a feeling of comfort long since unknown to him, peopled his solitude with beloved phantoms, and happy visions which dwelt with him even in sleep.

The next day, at twelve o'clock, he rang at Rivals' door.

As the worthy man had said, nothing was changed in the still unfinished house, and the verandah was every day becoming more rusty waiting in vain for its glass roof.

"Monsieur has not yet come home, Mademoiselle is in the surgery," said the little maid who had replaced the old faithful servant, and who now opened the door to Jack.

A young dog barking from the kennel in place of the former Newfoundland, proved in his way that things last longer than beings, to whatever species they may belong.

Jack went up to the surgery, the big room in which they used to play. He knocked sharply, impatient to see once more the friend who in his thoughts was still a child, and of whom the Doctor's affectionate pet name of the "little one" led him to think of, as if she were even now but seven years old.

"Come in, Monsieur Jack."

Instead of entering, Jack was seized with a dread and strange emotion.

"Come in," repeated the same voice—Cécile's voice, but stronger and more sonorous, richer, sweeter, deeper than in former days.

The door suddenly opened, and Jack, dazzled by a flood of light, wondered if it were not from that lovely, youthful, apparition standing on the threshold, from the light coloured dress, from the blue cashmere bodice, and the light halo of hair over the pale and gentle brow that the luminous rays were issuing. Ah! how intimidated he would have felt, if the eyes of this beautiful creature, eyes of a delicate and discreet grey, had not said clearly and naïvely: "Good morning, Jack! It is I, it is Cécile—do not fear." And if a little hand laid in his, had not recalled to him the loving warmth that had gone straight to his heart on that memorable fifteenth of August, when together they had carried round the bag.

"Life has been indeed hard towards you, Monsieur Jack, my grandfather has told me." (She looked at him with emotion.) "I, too, have been sorely tried. Grand-mamma is dead. She was very fond of you. We often talked about you."

Cécile alone spoke. Seated in front of her, he was lost in contemplation. She was tall and graceful in her simple attitude. At the present moment leaning against the old desk at which Madame Rivals used to write,


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she slightly bent down her head to talk to her friend with the movement of a swallow chirping at the edge of a roof.

Jack remembered that he had also seen his mother look very lovely, and had admired her with all his heart; but there was something about Cécile, that emanated from her like an indefinable perfume, a breath of divine springtide, so wholesome, so vivifying and so pure, that with it, all the seductive graces of Charlotte and her joyous laugh and sweeping gestures would have singularly jarred.

Suddenly, as he remained there entranced before her, his glance caught sight of one of his own hands, flatly spread out on his smock with the awkwardness peculiar to a workman's limbs at rest. His hand seemed to him enormous, black, indelibly black, seared with scratches and cuts, hardened and scorched by the contact of iron and fire, and finished by broken and rough nails. He felt ashamed of it, and knew not where to hide it. He got rid of it at last, by ramming it into his pocket.

But it was all over. A sudden perception of the ugliness of his whole person awoke within him. He saw himself as he was, seated, or rather sunk down on his chair his legs stretched out, ridiculously attired in corduroy trousers, and an old velvet jacket of d'Argenton's, too short in the sleeves. (It was his fate for his clothes to be too short.)

What could she think of him? How kind and indulgent she must be not to laugh out loud at him; for she well knew how to laugh notwithstanding her serious air, and a thousand little funny smiles lurked in the mobile nostrils of her straight little nose, and in the corners of her rather full and finely arched coral lips.

To his physical embarrassment, another one of a moral

kind arose within him, and added to his confusion and distress. All his debauchery, his sailor's orgies came back to his mind, and he felt as though the low haunts in all quarters of the globe where he had wallowed, had left their hideous impress upon him, and that this was visible. The sad line on her youthful and placid brow, the melancholy compassion of her beautiful eyes, all told him that she had noticed his abjectness; and he suffered and was ashamed.

Blessed shame and suffering! It was his soul awakening, all confused and bathed in tears. But he was not aware of it. He regretted he had come, and thought only of escape, of rushing down the stairs helter-skelter, of dashing to Les Aulnettes and locking himself in, and then throwing the key into the well, in order to avoid any further temptation of leaving the house.

Luckily some people came to the surgery, and Cécile busied herself with the copper scales, weighing out the medicines, numbering the powders, copying down the prescriptions as her grandmother formerly did. Jack no longer felt the weight of the young girl's gaze rivetted on his wretched person.

Then he felt free to admire her.

She was in truth admirable, full of gentleness and patience for these old peasant women, stupid and gossipy, whose lengthy explanations were endless and recurring.

She had a smile, a word of advice, an encouragement for each, a quiet way of bringing herself down to the level of those speaking to her, of bending all the grace of her mind towards them. At present she was occupied with an old acquaintance of Jack's, the old poacher, Mother Salé, who frightened him so terribly when he was a little boy. Bent almost double, like all the peasants whom the

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earth seems to draw down to her, in their daily labour; chapped by the sun, wizened and dust stained, old Salé still retained some life in her suspicious-looking eyes, blackened and deep sunk under the lids, like wicked beasts in the depths of their lairs. She spoke of her "man, her poor man, who had been ill now since many a month, could earn nothing, and yet would not make up his mind to die." She purposely spoke in this horrible manner, coarsely expressing herself in her brutal language, staring at the young girl, and taking pleasure in striving to put her out of countenance. Two or three times, Jack was seized with a violent longing to put her out of doors, the wicked and tattered old witch. But he contained himself on seeing Cécile remain so impassible under this aggressive coarseness, retaining a firm calmness on which the sharp-edged tooth of malignity was blunted.

When the prescription had been made up, the peasant woman withdrew with many curtseys and obsequiously false blessings. As she passed near Jack, she turned and recognized him.

"Oh! the little fellow of Les Aulnettes," said she out loud to Cécile, who accompanied her to the door. "My goodness, what a wreck! I say, Mam'selle Cécile, this will soon stop all the tongues that used to wag and formerly say, that Monsieur Rivals was cooking up little *Ragenton* as a husband for you. Sure, now, you won't have anything to say to him. It's a dreadful thing how life treats one all the same!"

And she went off chuckling.

Jack felt himself grow pale. Ah! the old thief, how well she had aimed that parting shot, that last blow of the sickle she had formerly threatened him with! A true sickle cut, made with a curved blade, cruel and twisted like its name. The blow struck deep, terribly

deep, and was long to heal. But Jack had not been hit alone, and I know someone, who appeared to be busily engaged in writing in the big book, and who wrote all crooked, with bent head, and blushes of vivid emotion.

“Catherine, quick, bring the soup and some good wine and some good brandy, the best of everything in fact.”

It was the doctor returning, who, catching sight of Jack and Cécile seated uneasily and silent opposite each other, burst into a joyful laugh.

“What! is that all you find to say to one another after seven years of absence. Come, quick, to lunch. That will soon put the poor lad at his ease.”

Luncheon did not, however, set Jack at ease, but on the contrary redoubled his embarrassment. In the presence of Cécile, he no longer knew how to eat, and trembled lest he should betray any low habits. At d’Argenton’s table, the bad manners contracted in his workman’s life had never troubled him. Here he felt ridiculous and out of place; and his unfortunate hands were a real torture to him. The one holding the fork could pass muster, for it was occupied. But the other, what on earth was he to do with it? On the white tablecloth all its scars stood out dreadfully. In sheer despair he let it fall by his side, which gave him the appearance of a one-armed man. Cécile’s attentions only augmented his timidity. She perceived this, and looked at him but stealthily till the close of the repast, which appeared to them interminable.

However, at last Catherine came to clear away the dessert, and set before the young girl hot water, sugar, and the long-necked bottle filled with old cognac. Since her grandmother was no longer there, it was Cécile

who mixed the doctor's grog, and the good man had not gained by the change, for, fearful lest she should make it too powerful, she had gradually arrived at composing quite a pharmaceutical lotion, "in which the dose of alcohol was diminished day by day," as Monsieur Rivals remarked with melancholy.

When she had given her grandfather his glass, the young girl turned to their guest.

"Do you drink brandy, Monsieur Jack?"

The doctor laughed.

"The idea of asking if he drinks brandy, he, a stoker! What questions the little girl asks. Don't you know they live on that, poor devils. I remember on board the *Bayonnaise*, there was one who used to break open the spirit-levels, and drink down the contents at a gulp. You may make it stiff for him! it will never be too strong."

She looked at Jack sweetly but sadly:

"Will you take some?"

"No, thank you, Mademoiselle," he replied in a low voice, almost ashamed. And if it did cost him a slight effort to draw back his glass, he felt well rewarded by one of those eloquent thanks that some women know how to say without speaking, and that are only understood by those they are addressed to.

"Come, that is another conversion!" said the worthy doctor, swallowing down his grog with a comical grimace. For his part, he was only partly converted, like the savages who consent to believe in God in order to please the missionary.

The Etiolles peasants, working in their fields, who saw Jack returning that afternoon from the Rivals, and going off with long strides down the road, must either have thought him mad, or upset by too copious a lunch at the doctor's. He gesticulated, talked out loud, shook his fist

at the horizon, and was the prey of an agitation and rage, that his habitual torpor would not have made one suppose him capable of.

"Workman!" he said, quivering all over. "Workman! I am that for life. Monsieur d'Argenton is right. I must stay with my equals, live and die with them, and above all never strive to raise myself. It is too cruel."

It was long since he had felt so nervous, so animated. New and unknown feelings arose within him, and at the bottom of each one, like a star broken by the thousand facets of the changing waters, radiated Cécile's image. What a splendour of grace, beauty, and purity! And to think that if instead of making a common workman of him, of casting his lot among the lowest herd, he had been properly brought up and educated, he might have become a man worthy of this young girl, might have married her, possessed such a treasure all to himself! Oh! God! And he cried out with the despairing rage of the drowning man, battling in vain with the waves, while he sees, a few strokes off, the shore bathed in sunlight where the nets lay spread out to dry.

At this instant, as he turned up the path leading to Les Aulnettes, he found himself face to face with old Mother Salé, labouring under a great load of wood. The hag looked at him with the wicked smile she had in the morning, when she said: "Sure, you won't have anything to say to him." Jack started forward, stung by her smile; and all the fury that boiled within him, that knew not whom to strike—for had it followed its natural impulse, it would have reached one that was very dear to him the weak and frivolous creature who was solely responsible for his disaster—all his fury turned against the horrible hag.

"Ah, viper," he thought, "I am going to tear out your fangs."

His face bore such a terrible expression, that seeing him coming towards her, old Salé, suddenly frightened, threw down her faggot and dashed into the wood with the fleetness of an old goat. It was a retaliation for her former pursuits. For a few steps he followed her, then suddenly he stopped.

“I am mad. The woman has said nothing but the truth, after all. Cécile would not have me now.”

That evening he did not dine, and lighted neither fire nor lamp. Seated in a corner of the dining-room, the only room he inhabited and in which he had gathered together the few pieces of furniture scattered about the house, his eyes fixed on the glass door through which the light fog of an autumnal night grew white in the invisible rays of the moon, he mused and thought, “Cécile would not have me now.”

This idea filled his whole evening.

She would not listen to him now. In truth, everything separated them. In the first place he was a workman, and then—the horrible word rose to his lips, “a bastard.” It was the first time in his life that the thought crossed his mind. For a child such things are indifferent when nothing in its immediate surroundings recalls the fact, and Jack had lived in an unscrupulous kind of world, passing from the society of the Failures to that of the working class, where every fault finds its excuse in poverty, and where illegitimate children are more numerous than anywhere else. Never having heard his father mentioned, he had never thought about him, and had barely felt the want of his affection; just as the deaf and dumb are aware of the senses they lack, without realizing to the full extent their utility, or the pleasures they procure.

Now, however, the question of his birth occupied him

more than anything else. When Charlotte had told him his father's name, he had remained perfectly calm at the astonishing revelation ; now he longed to question her, to drag from her, if necessary, details and even a confession in order to conceive an exact image of that unknown father. Marquis de l'Epan ? Was he really a Marquis ? Was not this some new fancy of that poor little brain infatuated with titles and aristocracy ? Was it true also that he was dead ? Had not his mother said that to avoid telling him some tale of abandonment which would have shamed her ? And yet if he was still alive, that father, if he were generous enough to atone for his fault, and give his son his name !

“ Jack, Marquis de l'Epan ! ”

He repeated these words, as though the title brought him nearer to Cécile. The poor fellow did not know that to touch a true womanly heart, all the vanities of the world are not worth the feeling of pity that opens it to all tenderness.

“ I will write to my mother,” he thought. But the questions he wanted to ask were so delicate, so complicated, so difficult to write, that he resolved to go and see Charlotte, and have with her one of those conversations in which glances assist words, and avowals are betrayed by a silence more eloquent than speech. Unfortunately he had not enough money to pay his railway fare. His mother was to have sent him some ; she had forgotten it, no doubt.

“ Pooh ! ” he said, “ I walked the distance when I was eleven years old. I shall be able to do it now, although I am rather weak.”

He did travel it again, that terrible road, and if it seemed less long and less terrifying, he, nevertheless, found it infinitely more sad. It is a very usual impression,


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this disenchantment of childhood's memories, viewed again at an age when all is reasoned and judged. It might be thought that there is some colouring matter in a child's eyes which lasts as long as the ignorance of his early glance; but which as he grows up, tarnishes and dims all that he formerly admired. Poets are men who have kept the eyes of their childhood.

Jack saw the spot where he had slept, the little gate at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges where he had stopped in order to make the kindly eared-cap believe that his mother lived there; the heap of stones by the side of the ditch where a stretched-out body had so terrified him, and the low pott-house, the hideous cut-throat place so often conjured up in his dreams! Alas! he had seen many a low den since then. The sinister faces of drunken workmen or of prowlers of the back slums, which had frightened him so much formerly, did not make any impression on him now; and he thought as he elbowed past them, that if the Jack of his youth rose up suddenly from the dust of the road, with the hesitating and hurried step of a runaway school-boy, and met the present living Jack, he would probably shrink from him more even than from any other lugubrious phantom.

He reached Paris at about one o'clock in the afternoon, in a cold drizzling rain; and following up the comparison he had been making between his past and present, he recalled to mind the splendid dawn, the beautiful rent in that May sky, in which his mother appeared to him at the end of his first journey, like the Archangel Michael in a halo of glory scattering with his light the dark cohorts of the night. Instead of the little villa des Aulnettes where his Ida sang in the midst of flowers, d'Argenton appeared before him, coming out of the cold cavern-like porch of the *Review of the Races of the Future*, followed by

Moronval laden with proofs and a troop of Failures engaged in rapidly exchanging the last words of a recent discussion.

"Hullo! Here's Jack," said the mulatto.

The poet started and raised his head. Looking at these two men, the one carefully got up, gloved and well brushed, just quitting a good table, the other emaciated in his old short velvet jacket, shiny with wear and wet, it would have been difficult to believe that any tie existed between them. And it is indeed the peculiar physiognomy of these ambiguous households, the blemish by which can be recognized the haphazard of such families, in which the father is a carpenter, the daughter a Comtesse, and the brother some suburban hairdresser.

Jack held out his hand to d'Argenton, who carelessly allowed him to take a finger, and asked if the villa was let.

"How? let?" said Jack, failing to catch his meaning.

"Of course, seeing you here, what else can I think, but that the house is taken and you are obliged to return to us?"

"No," said Jack, disconcerted, "no one has even come to see it since I have been there."

"Then what has brought you here?"

"I have come to see my mother."

"That is a freak I can understand. Unfortunately there are travelling expenses."

"I came on foot," said Jack very simply, with an air of assurance and quiet pride unusual to him.

"Ah!" said d'Argenton.

He paused a moment, and then fired off his shaft:

"Come, I am pleased to see that your legs are in a better working condition than your arms."

"There is a cutting word!" sniggered the mulatto.

The poet modestly smiled, and satisfied with the effect produced, went off, followed by his obsequious escort, in single file along the quays.

Eight days ago, d'Argenton's cruel words would have passed unheeded over Jack's brutishness, but since the previous day a change had come over him. A few hours had sufficed to make him proud and sensitive, so much so indeed that after this insult he felt inclined to return at once on foot as he had come, without even seeing his mother; but he wanted to speak to her, and to speak seriously. He went up.

The apartment was topsy-turvy; Jack found upholsterers putting up curtains, fixing benches, as if for a large school distribution of prizes. They were giving that very day a grand literary fête to which all the artistic and literary odds and ends had been invited; and that was the reason d'Argenton had been so annoyed at seeing Charlotte's son arrive. She did not either appear very well pleased. When she caught sight of him, she was in all the bustle of a hostess, occupied in transforming the rooms, devising little salons, boudoirs, and smoking-rooms out of every recess or dressing-room.

"What! my poor Jack, it is you? I am sure you have come for some money. You must have thought I had forgotten you. The fact is, I intended to send it by Monsieur Hirsch, who is going to Les Aulnettes in two or three days to carry out some very curious experiments on perfumes, a new medicine he has found out in a Persian book. You will see what an astonishing discovery he has made!"

They were standing talking in low tones in the midst of the workmen, who were coming and going, hammering in nails, and moving the furniture.

"I want to talk very seriously with you," said Jack.

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“Oh dear me, what about? You know that serious conversation has never been in my line. Then, you see everything is upset to-day with the preparations for our grand evening party. Oh! it will be magnificent. We have sent out five hundred invitations. I do not ask you to stay, because, you understand——. And then it would not amuse you. Well, as you absolutely insist on speaking to me, come out here on the terrace. I have arranged a verandah for the smokers, you will see how comfortable it is.”

She led him under a zinc-covered verandah, lined with striped tent-cloth, and ornamented with a divan, a flower-stand, and a hanging lamp, which in the day-light, in the sound of the pattering rain, and with the wet, foggy horizon on the banks of the Seine, looked sad and desolate.

Jack felt uncomfortable. He thought: “I should have done better to write,” and did not know how to begin.

“Well?” said Charlotte, stopping, resting her chin on her hand, in the pretty attitude of a listening woman.

He hesitated for an instant, much as one hesitates before placing a heavy weight on a light shelf destined for mere knick-knacks; what he had to say seemed to him weighty indeed for the little head bent down towards him.

“I want—I want to speak to you of my father.”

She was on the point of exclaiming “What an idea!” and if she did not pronounce the words, the whole expression of her face, in which astonishment, ennui and fear were reflected, spoke for her.

“It is a very sad subject for us both, my poor child, but however painful it is, I understand your curiosity and am ready to satisfy it. Moreover,” she solemnly

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added, "I had always intended, when you had attained twenty years of age, to reveal to you the secret of your birth."

This time, it was he who gazed astonished at her.

She did not then remember that three months before she had made this revelation. However, he did not protest against her forgetfulness. He would at least be able to compare what she now said with what she had already told him. He knew her so thoroughly!

"Is it true my father was a man of title?" he at once inquired.

"Certainly, of the highest aristocracy, my child."

"A marquis?"

"No, only a Baron."

"But I thought—you had said—"

"No, no, it was the elder branch of the Bulacs that had the marquisate."

"He was then allied to these Bulacs?"

"I should think so, he was the head of the younger branch."

"Then my father's name—was—?"

"Baron de Bulac, lieutenant in the Navy."

If the whole balcony had collapsed, dragged down with it the zinc-covered verandah and all it contained, Jack would not have experienced a more frightful shock. He had nevertheless the courage to ask:

"Is it long since he died?"

"Oh yes, very long," replied Charlotte, and she made an eloquent gesture as though to cast off into the distant past, this existence that for her had indeed become problematic.

His father was dead; that was probably the truth. Now was he a de Bulac or a de l'Epan? Did his mother lie this time, or the other day? After all, perhaps, it was

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not a lie, perhaps she did not even herself know the truth. What a shame and disgrace !

“How ill you are looking, my Jack,” said Charlotte, interrupting herself in the middle of a long romantic story into which she had impetuously dashed after her naval officer ; “your hands are icy. I was wrong to bring you out on this balcony.”

“It is nothing,” said Jack with an effort, “it will soon pass off in walking.”

“What ! you are already leaving ? Well, perhaps you are right, you had better get home early—in this bad weather. Come, kiss me.”

She kissed him tenderly, turned up the collar of his jacket, gave him a plaid of her own on account of the cold, and slipped a little money into his pocket. She fancied that the sadness which overspread his countenance was caused by the sight of the preparations for a festivity at which he could not be present, and was anxious to see him take his departure. When, therefore, her maid came to say : “The hairdresser has come, Madame,” she took advantage of the interruption to hurry her goodbye :

“You see I must leave you. Take care of yourself ; write often.”

He went down slowly, clinging to the banisters. His brain was in a whirl.

Oh ! no, it was not this evening party of theirs that weighed upon his heart, but the thought of all those other rejoicings in life to which he had never been bidden : the rejoicings of children who have a father and mother to love and respect ; the rejoicings of all those who have a name of their own, a hearth, a family that is theirs. He knew also now there was yet another rejoicing fate would pitilessly debar him from, the rejoicing of a

happy love which unites one for ever to some beautiful, good, and loyal being. He would never be bidden to that rejoicing! And the unhappy fellow grieved, not perceiving that to regret this happiness was already to be worthy of it, that there was an immense difference between his former torpor and this clear vision of his sad destiny, which alone could give him strength for the struggle.

A prey to these sad reflections, he approached the station for Lyons, through the poverty-stricken quarters where the mud seems thicker and the fog heavier, because the houses are black and the gutters filthy, and the wretchedness of mankind augments and increases the melancholy of nature. It was the hour when the factories close. A whole population of emaciated and weary men, a human flood bearing along with it discouragement and misery, was spreading over the pavements and bye-streets, wending its way towards the taverns and low pot-houses, some of which bore for sign-board "A LA CONSOLATION," as though drunkenness and forgetfulness were the sole refuge for the wretched. Jack, worn out and chilled through, feeling the horizon of his existence as hermetically closed in, as the horizon of the heavens was in this cold and rainy autumnal evening, had all at once a gesture and cry of despair.

"They are right, by God! There is but that—drink! And crossing one of those filthy thresholds contaminated by abject slumbers, or murderous drunken brawls, the former stoker called for a double ration of *vitriol*.* But at the moment he was raising his glass, in the midst of the uproarious crowd, the smoke of tobacco, and the

* It is the name given to brandy by the Parisian populace. Wine is called *pichenet*.

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dense mist made by the wine-bibbers' breath, and the blouses soaked in rain, he seemed to see a celestial smile dawn upon him, and a soft penetrating voice murmur in his ear :

“ Do you drink brandy, Monsieur Jack ? ”

No, certainly not, he would not drink brandy, he never would drink any again. He quitted the tavern abruptly, leaving his glass at the bar, on which his money, sharply thrown down, re-echoed amid the general astonishment.



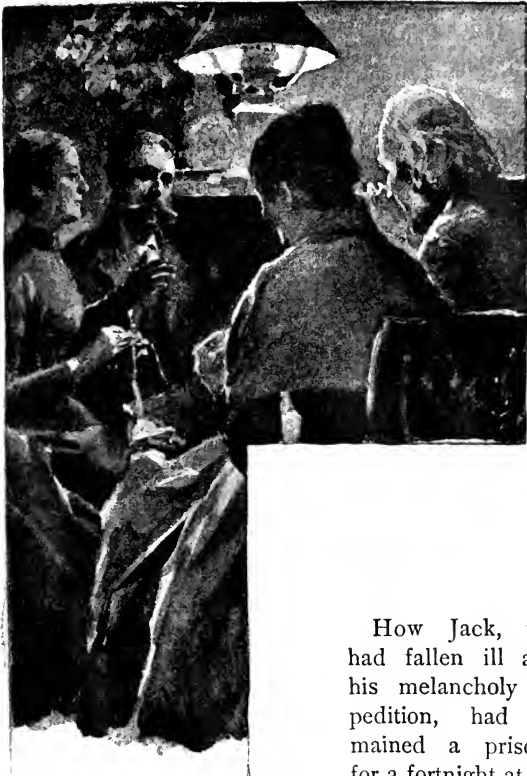


II.

CONVALESCENCE.



Jack and Cécile each seized an osier basket and set to work.



How Jack, who had fallen ill after his melancholy expedition, had remained a prisoner for a fortnight at Les Aulnettes, given over to the care of Doctor Hirsch, who practised upon this new Mâdou his system of treatment by perfumes; how Monsieur Rivals came to his rescue, carried him off by main force to his own house, and restored him to life and health, would be somewhat tedious to relate, and I

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prefer at once to show you our friend Jack, installed in a comfortable arm-chair at one of the windows of the "surgery," books within reach of his hand, and repose everywhere around him ; a refreshing repose arising from the tranquil horizon, from the silent house, from the light footstep of Cécile bringing within reach of his indolence just the amount of activity needful to make the convalescent thoroughly enjoy his long days of complete inaction.

He was so happy that he did not even speak, content to keep his half-opened eyes fixed on that dear presence, to listen to Cécile's needle or her pen on the ruled lines of her account-book.

"Oh ! what a grandfather he is ! I am certain he slurs over the half of his visits. Only yesterday he contradicted himself twice. He declared he had not been to the Gou-deloups, and the very next minute he said the woman was a little better. You noticed that, did you not, Jack ?"

"Mademoiselle ?" said he with a start.

He had not heard what she said, he was gazing at her as she sat there, simple as ever, always like herself, graceful without that studied childishness, that playfulness of little girls who know that thoughtlessness has a grace of its own, and spoil it by affectation. In her, all was depth and seriousness. Her voice rang amid spaces of thought, her glance absorbed and retained light. One felt that all that entered and all that went out of this soul, came from afar, and travelled far. This was so true that words,—that current exchange of thought, well worn and half effaced though it may be—took, when suddenly pronounced by her, a freshness of recoinage that was astounding, as it sometimes happens when they are linked with music, and enveloped in some magic chord of Handel or Palestrina. If Cécile said : "My friend Jack," it seemed to Jack that no one had ever

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previously called him so ; and when she said " Good-bye," his heart sank as if he were never to see her again, so much, in this serene and reflective nature, did everything take a definitive sense. In the singular state of convalescence wherein the weakened being is so open to every physical and moral influence that it shivers at the slightest draught, and is warmed by the faintest ray of sun, Jack became keenly impressed by all this charm.

Ah ! what happy, delightful days were those passed in that blessed house, and how calculated was all around him to bring about a speedy cure ! The " Surgery," a great bare room with its high wooden cupboards painted white and its white muslin curtains, its windows looking towards the south over the end of a village street and the horizon of fields in harvest, imparted to him its healthy calm, its strengthening odours of dried herbs, of plants gathered in the full glory of their bloom. Here nature seemed to place herself within the reach of the invalid, softened down and beneficent, and he breathed in its charm with delight. He could fancy the babble of brooks in the smell of the balsams, and the forest arches of verdure in the perfume of the centaureas which had been gathered at the foot of its great oaks.

As strength returned to him, Jack tried to read. He turned over the old books of the library, and found many among them that he had studied formerly, which he now took up again, better able to comprehend them. Cécile went on with her daily work, and the doctor being always out, the two young people remained alone, under the care of the little servant. It was enough to give rise to gossip, and the constant presence of this great youth by the side of this lovely girl shocked many a prudent mother. Certainly, if Madame Rivals had lived, things would have been different ; but the doctor was only a child himself

between these other two children. And moreover, who knows? perhaps the worthy doctor had ideas of his own on the subject.

Meanwhile d'Argenton, hearing how completely Jack was installed at the Rivals', took it as a personal insult.

"It is not at all suitable that you should be there," Charlotte wrote to her son. "Just think how bad it must look for us in the neighbourhood. They will say we are not able to look after you ourselves. It is a tacit reproach to us."

This first letter remaining without effect, the poet wrote himself, HIMSELF: "I have sent Hirsch to attend you, but you have chosen to prefer the idiotic routine prescribed by a country doctor, to all the science of our friend. I hope to Heavens you may be the better for it! Anyhow, as you are now convalescent, I give you two days to return to Les Aulnettes; if in two days you have not returned, I shall consider you in open revolt against my authority, and from that moment all will be at an end between us. A word to the wise."

Finally, as Jack still did not move, Charlotte made her appearance. She came with an air of great dignity, her bag full of chocolate to nibble on the road, and a collection of phrases learnt by heart, suggested by her "artist." Monsieur Rivals received her in the ground floor room, and without being in the least intimidated by the apparent coldness of the lady, by the compression of her usually smiling lips, and the effort she made to restrain the exuberance of her speech, he blurted out:

"I must tell you, Madame, that it is I who prevented Jack from returning to Les Aulnettes. His life was at stake. Yes, Madame, his life. Your son is passing through a terrible crisis of fatigue, exhaustion, and growth. Happily he is still at an age when constitutions can be reformed, and I hope he may resist this sharp attack,

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provided only you do not confide the care of him to your miserable Hirsch, that assassin who was asphyxiating him with incense, musk, and benzoin, under pretence of curing him. I do not suppose you knew of that. I went and fetched him away from Les Aulnettes, from the midst of clouds of smoke, and crowds of inhalers, aspirators, incense burners. I turned out the whole cargo of medicaments with a kick, and I am afraid the doctor with them. Now the child is out of danger. Leave him with me a little longer, and I undertake to send him back to you stronger than before, and capable of returning to his hard life; but if you give him up to that awful druggist, I shall think that your son is in your way, and that you want to get rid of him."

"Oh! Monsieur Rivals, what a thing to say to me! What have I done, good Heavens, to deserve such an insult?"

This last question naturally brought about a deluge of tears, which the doctor dried with a few kind words; then Charlotte reassured, went upstairs to see her Djack, who was sitting alone in the surgery reading. She found him changed, improved, as if he had slipped out of some coarse and heavy shroud, but languid and exhausted by the effort of the transformation. She was greatly moved. He turned pale on seeing her enter:

"You have come to take me away?"

"No, no, certainly not; you are too comfortable here, and what would the good doctor, who is so fond of you say, if I carried you off?"

For the first time in his life Jack thought that one might be happy away from one's mother, and the grief of leaving his present quarters would have certainly caused a relapse. They remained alone together for a few minutes, talking. Charlotte gave way to a few confidences. She had not a very well satisfied air: "You see,

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my child, this literary life is really too exciting. Now, we have great fêtes once a month. Every fortnight there is a reading. All this is very harassing for me. My poor head is not very strong naturally, and I do not know how it bears it all. Monsieur Moronval's Japanese Prince has written a great poem, in his own language, of course. And HÆ has taken it into his head to translate it, verse for verse. So he is taking lessons in Japanese, and as you can suppose, I am doing the same! And very difficult it is. Really, I begin to think that literature is not my strong point. There are days when I no longer know what I am doing or saying. And then that Review does not bring us in a penny, has not even one subscriber! By the way, you know poor '*Bon Ami*;' well, he is dead! It grieved me very much. Do you remember him?"

At this moment Cécile entered.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Cécile, how you have grown. How pretty you are."

She opened her arms wide, shook out all the falling laces of her mantle to embrace the young girl; but Jack felt a little uncomfortable. For worlds he would not have spoken of d'Argenton or "*Bon Ami*" before Cécile, and several times he interrupted the idle babble of his mother, who had by no means the same scruples. While moved by a great feeling of tenderness for Charlotte, he put each one of these two loves of his life in its right place: the one he protected, the other protected him, and there was as much pity in his filial affection, as there was respect in this, his first impulse of real love.

They wished to keep Madame d'Argenton to dine; but she declared she had already paid them a long visit, too long for the ferocious selfishness of the poet. And then, from a certain hour, up to the moment of leaving she was uneasy and preoccupied. She was weaving



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beforehand the little story she would relate on returning by way of excuse.

“Above all, my Jack, if you have to write to me, send your letter to the post office to be called for. You see he is very much vexed with you at this moment. So then, I, too, must seem vexed. Do not be astonished if you get a lecture from me. He is always there when I write to you. Often, indeed, he dictates to me. Let me see. I will put a cross at the end of the letter that will mean: ‘This does not count.’”

She thus naïvely confessed her slavery; but what consoled Jack for the tyranny that oppressed his mother, was to see the poor silly creature go off so young and so gay, with her costume so well draped upon her, and her travelling bag carried on her arm, as cheerfully and as lightly as she would have carried no matter what burden life might have chanced to lay upon her.

Have you ever observed those water-plants with their long stems, which start from the bottom of the rivers, lengthen as they mount upwards, and making their way through all the obstacles of the aquatic vegetation, finally burst on the surface into magnificent corollas, rounded as cups and perfumed with a delicate scent, to which the bitterness and the green of the waters impart a slightly wild savour? Thus did love grow in the hearts of these two children. This love had its root in a far past, in their tenderest childhood, in that time when every seed that is sown carries in it the germ and promise of a flowering maturity. With Cécile, the divine flowers had grown straight upwards in a limpid soul wherein even tolerably far-sighted eyes might have easily discerned them. With Jack they had been checked in muddy holes, amid inextricable plants that had wound themselves around the stems like bonds to prevent their growth.

But now at length they reached the regions of air and light, and stood erect; they now sprang up and almost showed their flowery visage on the surface, where the ripple of the wavelets passed over them lightly, with a shiver. It needed only a little, a very little, to make them open. It was the work of an hour of love and sunshine.

"If you like," said Monsieur Rivals one evening to the two young people, "we will all go to-morrow to the vintage at Coudray. The farmer has proposed to send his cart for us. You two can go in the morning, and I will join you in time for dinner."

They accepted joyfully. They started one lovely morning towards the end of October, in a faint mist which seemed to clear away at each turn of the wheels, rising like a gauze veil, disclosing an exquisite landscape. On the harvested fields, on the golden sheaves of corn, on the slender plants, last efforts of the summer, floated long threads of white and silky gossamer, trailing like scraps of fog rising skywards. It spread a cloth of spun silver over all those flat expanses that autumn stamps with so much grandeur and solemnity. The river ran below the high road, bordered by ancient demesnes and enormous groups of trees, reddened by the bygone summer. A widespread freshness, the lightness of the air, contributed to the good spirits of the travellers, who, shaken up on the hard seats, and their feet in the straw, held on with all their might to the sides of the cart. One of the farmer's daughters drove the little obstinate gray donkey, who shook his long ears, worried by the wasps, which, at this time of the year when the fruit harvest flings its delicious scents into the air, are very numerous.

Away they trotted and trotted. Etiolles, Soisy, were passed in turn on each side of the road in those chance effects of view that are the joy of travel. The bridge of

Corbeil was crossed, and at a short distance from the little town, following the river's edge, they found themselves amid the vintage in full swing.

A whole swarm of workers had alighted upon the slopes running down to the Seine, and were plucking and gathering with that hail-like sound that silkworms make in the mulberry branches. Jack and Cécile each seized an osier basket, the first that came, and rushed to work. Oh ! what a charming spot it was, the rustic landscape seen through the vines, the narrow, turning, winding, picturesque Seine covered with green islets, something like a miniature Rhine near Basle ; not far off a weir, with its noise of falling water, its whirlpool of foam ; and over all things, the sun mounting in the sky through a golden mist, by the side of a slender white crescent, which just hinted in this glorious day, at days grown shorter and fires to be lit betimes.

And indeed, this lovely day was very short, at least Jack found it very short. He did not leave Cécile for a minute, and incessantly kept in view her narrow-brimmed straw hat, her skirt of flowered cambric, and her basket which he filled with the finest bunches, carefully gathered, covered with that fresh bloom, fragile as the down on a butterfly's wing, which gives the berry the transparence of dulled glass. Together they looked at this bloom on the fruit ; and when Jack raised his eyes, he admired on his sweetheart's cheeks, at the edges of her temples and her lips, a similar bloom, a down as delicate ; a softness of all the features, such as dawn, youth, solitude, leave upon grapes that yet hang to the branch, and on hearts that have not yet loved. The young girl's hair waving lightly in the air, added to the ethereal appearance. Never had he seen her with so animated an expression. The exercise and excitement of the picturesque work, the

gaiety communicated to the whole vineyard by the calls, the songs, and laughter of the vintagers had transformed Monsieur Rivals' quiet housekeeper ; she had become again the child she was, she ran down the slopes, carried her basket on her shoulder, her arm upraised, her pure face intent on the balance of her burden, with that rhythmical step that Jack remembered having noticed in the Breton women, who, carrying their jars full of water on their heads, strive to reconcile the speed of their steps with the steady uprightness necessary to the burden they bear.

There came a moment, however, in the day, when fatigue caused the two children to seat themselves by the edge of a little wood, all carpeted with pink-flowered heather and crisp with dry leaves.

And then ?

Strange to say they did not speak. Their love was not of the kind that is quickly formulated and confessed. They allowed the evening sky to close mysteriously upon the most beautiful dream they had ever dreamed in their lives, an intoxicating, fleeting dream, full of the perfume of Nature, and to which the quick-falling twilight of autumn suddenly lent its charm of domestic felicity, in lighting up here and there distant windows or invisible thresholds that aroused thoughts of home and its loved ones. As the breeze grew chillier, Cécile insisted upon folding round Jack's neck a woollen wrap she had brought. The softness of the material, its warmth, its odour of carefully kept apparel, were all like a caress, that turned the lover pale.

"What is the matter, Jack ? you are in pain ?"

"Oh, no ! Cécile, I have never been so well !"

She had taken his hand ; but when she would have drawn hers away, he in his turn detained it, and they remained for a moment silent, with fingers interlaced.

That was all.

When they reached the farm, the doctor had just arrived. They could hear his kindly voice below in the courtyard, and the wheels of his carriage rolling back, as the horse was taken out. The freshness of autumn evenings has a poetry that Jack and Cécile felt as they entered the low room where the fire for supper was blazing. The coarse cloth, the flowered plates, the strong odour of a peasant's repast, all contributed to the rustic character of the fête, ending at dessert with a cascade of grapes rolled on to the table, and much going and coming from the cellar, for a general tasting of old and new vintages. Jack, wholly wrapt up in Cécile, showed a profound disdain for the dust-covered bottles that were produced from the cellar. The doctor, on the contrary, much appreciated this commendable habit of vintage feasts; he even appreciated it so much that his granddaughter rose noiselessly, had the horse put in, wrapped herself in her cloak, and then good old Rivals, seeing her ready, rose from the table, got into the trap and took the reins, leaving his glass half full upon the board, to the great scandal of the guests.

All three came back together, as in old times, through the solitude of the country, only a little more crowded in the gig, which had not grown bigger as they had, and which now made, as it rolled over the roads, a rattling of springs completely worn out. This noise, however, took away nothing from the charm of the drive, which the stars, countless in autumn, followed from on high like a golden shower hung in the bracing air. They passed along park walls, overflowing with branches that brushed them as they went by, terminated for the most part by some mysterious little pavilion with all its shutters closed, as if it held the past shut up within its shadows; on the other hand was the Seine, where only the lock-keepers' houses

were lighted, and down which there slowly glided, confided to the keeping of the current, long rafts of wood and barges, at each end of which, bows and stern, burned silent fires, reflected in the waters.

"You are not cold, Jack?" asked the doctor.

How should he have been cold? Cécile's great shawl caressed him with its fringes, and then there was so much sunshine in his thoughts.

Alas! why must there be a morrow to all such marvellously beautiful days? Why must the realities of life wrench us away from our dreams? Jack knew now that he loved Cécile, but he felt also that his love only destined him to further suffering. She was too far above him, and though he had changed indeed while living beside her, though he had cast off something of his rough bark, he felt himself unworthy of the dainty fairy who had transformed him. The mere idea that the maiden might guess his passion embarrassed him in her presence. Moreover, health was returning, and he began to feel ashamed of the long hours of inaction spent in the "surgery." Cécile was so brave and so hard working! What would she think of him if he remained there?

Cost what it might, he must go.

One morning he went to Monsieur Rivals to thank him, and tell him of his resolution.

"You are right," said the worthy man; "now that you are strong again and in good health, you should work. With the certificates you have, you will soon find work."

There was a moment's silence. Jack felt himself greatly moved, and also rather embarrassed by the singular fixity of Monsieur Rivals' gaze.

"You have nothing to say to me?" asked the doctor suddenly.

Jack, reddening and confused, replied:

“Why, no, Monsieur Rivals.”

“Ah! I had thought somehow, that when one was in love with a dear child who has no other relation than an old fellow of a grandfather, it would be from him one would ask her hand.”

Jack, without answering, hid his face in his hands.

“Why do you cry, Jack? You see that things are not going on so badly, since it is I who speak of the matter first.”

“Oh! Monsieur Rivals, is it possible? A wretched mechanic like me!”

“Work so that you may be one no longer. You can raise yourself. I can tell you how, if you wish.”

“But that is not all—not all. You do not know the worst. I am—I am—”

“Yes, I know, you are a bastard,” said the doctor very calmly. “Well, so is she, bastard, and something worse than that. Come nearer, child, and listen.”



III.

THE RIVALS' MISFORTUNE.



Seated by my side, she related to me, in a low voice, her horrible history.



THEY were in the doctor's study. Through the open window the eye fell upon a lovely autumn landscape, country roads edged with leafless trees, and beyond the old village cemetery, closed

these fifteen years, its straggling yews standing among the high grass, its crosses inclined this way and that by the ever-renewed digging of the burial-ground,

less restful and stationary than any other. "You have never been in there," said Monsieur Rivals to Jack, as he pointed to the old cemetery in the distance, "or you would have seen among the briars a great white stone on which is inscribed one word: 'MADELEINE.' It is my daughter,—the mother of Cécile—who is buried there. She wished to be laid apart from us all and with only her Christian name written on her tomb, declaring she was not worthy to bear the name of her father and mother. Dear child! she who was so proud and so honest. And nothing would turn her from her fixed decision. You can imagine what a grief it was to us, after losing her so young,—only twenty,—to be obliged to lay her to her solitary rest! But the wishes of the departed must be fulfilled. It is by them that they survive, that they remain amongst us. That is why our daughter rests there alone, according to her wish. Nevertheless, she had done nothing to merit this exile in death, and if any one ought to be punished, it should be I, old fool that I was, whose inconceivable and incurable folly caused our misfortune.

"One day, eighteen years ago and exactly in this very month of November, I was sent for, on account of an accident that had happened in one of those great shooting parties which take place three or four times a year in the forest of Sénart. In the excitement of the battue, one of the shooters had received the whole charge of a breech-loader in his leg. I found the wounded man laid on the great bed at the Archambaulds, where he had been taken at once,—a handsome fellow, about thirty years of age, fair and vigorous, his head a little thick set, heavy eyebrows over very light eyes, those Northern eyes which the glitter of the white ice seems to lighten. He bore admirably the extraction of the charge, which I had to make shot by

shot, and when the operation was finished, thanked me in very good French, with a soft, foreign sing-song accent. As he could not be moved without danger, I continued to attend him at the keeper's cottage. I heard that he was a Russian of good family: 'Count Nadine' his shooting companions called him.

"Although the wound was a dangerous one, Nadine soon got over it, thanks to his youth and his good constitution; thanks also to the care of Mother Archambauld; but he still remained unable to walk much, and as I thought his solitude must weigh upon him, and that it was hard for a young man accustomed to luxury and good society to spend a convalescence in winter in the middle of the forest, with leaves and branches for horizon, and for all company the silent Archambauld and his pipe, I often came to fetch him in my carriage as I came back from my rounds. He dined with us. Sometimes even, when the weather was too bad, he slept at our house.

"I must confess it, I was very fond of that villain. I do not know where he had acquired all he knew, but he knew everything. He had been a sailor, a soldier, made the tour of the world, understood tactics and navigation. He gave my wife the pharmaceutical recipes of his country; he taught my daughter the songs of Ukraine. We were all positively under a charm, myself above all, and when I would return home in the evening, cut by the wind and rain, jolted by the gig, it was delightful to think that I should find him by my fireside, and I associated him in my mind with the bright family group waiting for me in the dark night, at the end of my journeys. My wife made a little resistance to the general infatuation, but as this distrust was a habit of her character, adopted to counter-balance my easy-going ways, I paid no attention to it.

"However, our invalid began to get better and better: he was even perfectly fit to finish his winter in Paris; but he made no sign of moving. The country seemed to suit him, to attract him. By what ties? I had never thought of asking myself.

"Finally, one day, my wife came to me and said:

"Look here, Rivals, Monsieur Nadine must explain his intentions, or come less frequently to the house; the neighbours are beginning to talk about him and Madeleine."

"Madeleine! What an idea!"

"I had the naïve conviction that it was for my sake the Count remained at Etiolles, for the game of backgammon we played every evening, for the seafaring talks we had over our grog. Idiot! I need only have looked at my daughter when he came in, seen her change colour, bend lower over her embroidery, remain mute in his presence, edge towards the window to watch for his arrival. But there are no worse eyes than those that will not see, and I was obstinately blind. However, the evidence was unanswerable, Madeleine had owned to her mother that they loved each other. I went at once to seek the Count, firmly resolved to have an explanation.

"He did accordingly explain himself, and so frankly, so openly, that it went to my heart. He loved my daughter and demanded her hand, but without concealing from me all the obstacles that his family, full of aristocratic pride, would oppose to our project. He added that he was of age to dispense with a parental consent, and that his personal fortune, joined to what I should give Madeleine, would amply suffice for the expenses of their establishment. A great disproportion of fortune would have alarmed me; what he told me of the modest extent of his resources at once reassured me, and also that air

of aristocratic simplicity, that easy way of arranging affairs, of deciding everything, that readiness to sign anything with closed eyes. To be brief, he was installed in the house in the character of our future son-in-law, while we were still wondering by what entrance he had come in. I certainly did feel that this was a little irregular, going a little too fast; but my daughter's happiness turned my head, and when the mother said to me: 'We must make inquiries, we cannot trust our child to chance,' I laughed at her and her perpetual anxieties. I was so sure of my man! One day, however, I did speak of him to Monsieur de Viéville, one of the principal lessees of the shooting in the forest:

" 'To tell the truth, my dear Rivals,' he answered, 'I know nothing of the Count Nadine. He seemed to me a capital fellow; I know he bears a great name, and is well educated. That is more than enough for a day's shooting together. At the same time, it is certain that if I were going to give him my daughter in marriage, I should look a little closer into the matter. In your place, I should apply at the Russian Embassy. There they must have all necessary information, I imagine.'

"Perhaps you think, my dear Jack, that after this I should have nothing more pressing than to go to the Embassy. Well, I did not! I was too careless, above all too lazy. All through my life, I have never done all I wished, for want of time. I do not know whether I lose time or squander it; but my existence, at whatever age I may die, will have been too short by half for all I have had to do. Tormented by my wife on the subject of these unlucky inquiries I ended by lying to her: 'Yes, yes, I have been—most satisfactory, sterling gold, these Counts Nadine.' I have remembered since the strange air of the rascal each time he thought I was going to Paris, or

had come from thence ; but at that time I saw nothing, being entirely absorbed in the bright plans for the future, with which the children filled their happy days. They were to live with us three months in the year and spend the rest of the time in Saint Petersburg, where a high official position had been offered to Nadine. My poor wife herself ended by sharing the general happiness and confidence.

“The end of the winter passed in continual conferences and correspondence. The Count’s papers were long in coming, the parents refused their consent, and during that time the intimacy increased, the links drew closer, so that I sometimes asked myself uneasily : ‘What if the papers should not come?’ At last we received them : a packet of crowded hieroglyphics impossible to decipher, certificates of birth, baptism, exemption from military service. What amused us was a page filled with the titles, Christian and sur-names of the intended, Ivanovitch, Nicolavitch, Stephanovitch, a whole genealogy that lengthened the family name at each generation.

“‘Have you really so many names as all that?’ said my poor daughter laughing, she being called plain Madeleine Rivals. Ah ! the scoundrel, he had many another besides !

“At first, there was an idea of having the marriage celebrated in Paris, at Saint-Thomas-d’Aquin with great pomp ; but Nadine reflected that it would not do to brave paternal authority so openly. and the ceremony took place quite simply at Etioles, in the little church you know which keeps upon its register the record of an irreparable lie. What a happy day it was ! What joy for me ! Only a father, do you see, can understand these things. My pride, for instance, when I entered the church

with my daughter trembling on my arm, and the joy of saying to myself: 'My child is happy, and owes it to me.' Oh! that sound of the beadle's halberd under the porch will live in my heart all the days of my life. Then, after mass, there was breakfast at home and the departure of the children in a post-chaise for their honeymoon. I can see them still as they sat close together in the back of the carriage, in the excitement of the double joy of their happiness and the coming journey as they disappeared in a cloud of dust, and the merry jingle of bells and cracks of the whip.

"In such a case those who go away are happy; but those who remain behind are sad. When that evening the mother and I sat down to table, the empty place between us gave us a keen sense of our loneliness. And then it had all been done so quickly, without giving us time to prepare ourselves for the separation. We looked at each other in stupefaction. As for me, I had my rounds, my patients, my out-door work; but the poor mother was reduced to facing her regrets in every corner of the house that recalled the absent one to her. It is the destiny of women. All their griefs and their joys come to them from the interior of their home, are concentrated there, and attach so securely that they may be found in the cupboard they are setting to rights, or in the embroidery they are finishing. Happily the letters we received from Pisa and Florence were brimming over with love and sunshine. Then we were busy with arrangements for the children. I would build a little house for them by the side of ours. We would choose the papers, the paint, the hangings. Every day we talked of them. 'They are here; they are there; they are going further away; they are drawing nearer.' At length, we begin to expect those final letters written on

the homeward journey which are often preceded by the travellers themselves.

“One evening, when I had come in very late from my rounds, and was dining alone, my wife having gone to bed, I heard a hurried step in the garden, on the stairs. The door opened. It was my daughter. No longer the lovely young girl who had left us a month ago, but a miserable creature, thin, pale, altered, clothed in a wretched dress, a travelling bag in her hand, and a wild, haunted, bewildered look of misery in her face.

“‘It is I; here I am.’

“‘Good heavens! what has happened? Where is Nadine?’

“She made no answer, shut her eyes, and began to tremble. Oh, how she trembled! You can imagine my agony.

“‘For Heaven’s sake, my child, speak. Where is your husband?’

“‘I have none. I never had one.’

“And then, seated by my side, there, where you are, she related to me, in a low voice without looking at me, her horrible history.

“He was not a Count; he was not called Nadine. He was a South Russian Jew named Roesch, a wretched adventurer, a spy, one of those men who have tried every trade because they can stick to none. He had been married at Riga, married at St. Petersburg. All his papers were false, forged by himself. As to his means, he owed them to his skill in forging Russian bank notes. He had been arrested at Turin on an extradition order. Imagine my darling alone in that strange town, violently separated from her husband, learning that he was a forger and a bigamist; for the wretch confessed to all his crimes. She had but one idea: to take refuge here, with us. She had so lost her head, as she related later

on, that at the station she could no longer find her words, and said to the clerk when he asked her where she was going :

“ ‘ Home, to mamma.’ She had rushed off, leaving her dresses and jewels at the hotel, all that the villain had given her, and had come on without a break in her long journey. At last, however, she was in safe shelter, flown back to the nest, and for the first time since the catastrophe broke into tears. I said to her :

“ ‘ Calm yourself, be quiet, you will wake your mother.’

“ But my tears fell still faster than hers.

“ The next day my wife learnt all. She made me no reproach. ‘ I knew very well,’ she said, ‘ that some misfortune would come of this marriage.’ She had had a presentiment from the very first day that man entered our house. Ah ! they talk of our medical diagnosis. But what is it in comparison with the warnings and confidences that fate whispers in the ear of some women ? My daughter’s arrival was soon known in the neighbourhood.

“ ‘ Well, Monsieur Rivals, so our travellers are back again ?’ I was asked for information, for news of them, but they could see by my manner that I was not happy. They could see that the Count was absent, that Madeleine and her mother never went out, and soon I felt myself surrounded by a sympathizing compassion that was more painful than all.

“ I did not even yet know the full extent of my misfortune. My daughter had not confided her secret to me : a child was to be born of this deceptive, illegitimate, dishonouring marriage. What a sad household we were then ! By our saddened hearth, Madeleine sewed at the baby-linen, and trimmed with lace and ribbons the tiny garments which are the joy and pride of mothers, but which she,

alas! could not look at without shame, at least I believed so; the least allusion to the wretch who had betrayed her, made her shudder and turn pale, the thought of having belonged to '*that*' seemed to embarrass her like a stain. But my wife, who saw more clearly than I did, sometimes said to me: 'You are mistaken. I am sure she loves him still.' Yes, she loved him, and however great might be her scorn and her hatred, love was greater yet within her heart. What undoubtedly killed her, was the remorse she felt at continuing to love so base a thing; for she died very soon, a few days after giving us our little Cécile. It seemed as though she only waited for that to die. We found beneath her pillow a folded letter, well worn at the folds, blotted and effaced with tears, the only one Nadine had ever written to her before her marriage. She must have constantly re-read it; but she was far too proud to own to it, and she died without once pronouncing that name, which—I am sure of it,—was ever hovering on her lips.

"You are astonished, are you not, my child, that in a quiet little house in a village, one of those dark and tangled dramas should have taken place, that seem only possible in the confusion of great cities like London or Paris? When fate thus by chance attacks a quiet corner so well hidden behind hedges and woods of alders, it makes me think of those stray balls which, during a battle, kill a labourer by the side of a field, or a child returning from school. It is the same blind barbarity.

"I think that if we had not had little Cécile, my wife would have died along with her daughter. Her life from that day was but one long silence, filled with regret and self-reproach. You have seen it yourself. But it was necessary to bring up the child, to bring her up at home

and keep her in ignorance of the misfortune of her birth. It was a terrible task we had set ourselves! We were, it is true, freed for ever from the father, who died a few months after his sentence. Unluckily, two or three persons in the country-side knew the whole history. The difficulty was to keep Cécile from all idle gossip; and above all from one of those naïve cruelties of which children have the secret, which they utter with smiling lips and bright eyes, innocent reporters of all they hear. You know how lonely the little thing was before she knew you. Thanks to this precaution, she is still ignorant of the terrible hurricane in which she was born. She has only been told that she is an orphan; and to explain her bearing the name of Rivals, that her mother married in the family.

“Nevertheless it must be admitted that this tacit agreement to silence, on the part of a little village ordinarily so fond of gossip and scandal, is a proof that there are many kind-hearted people in the world. Among those who know of our misfortune, never has one been found to make the least painful allusion before Cécile, nor even to pronounce a word that could give her any suspicion as to the drama that was enacted round her cradle. That did not prevent the poor grandmother from living in perpetual fear. She dreaded above all the child's questions, and I too feared them as much as she did; but I had other alarming thoughts far more disturbing and important. The mysteries of heredity are so terrible! Who could tell if the daughter of my daughter had not brought with her into the world some fearful instinct bred within her, that inheritance of vice which, in default of other fortune, these scoundrels sometimes leave as a legacy to their children. Yes, I can say so to you, Jack, who know this miracle of grace and purity, I was terrified

lest at any moment I should see the father re-appear in those angel-like features, lest I should trace the paternal heritage still further perverted by all the coquettish resources of the woman. But what a joy it was, what a pride to see the exquisite and refined image of her mother, develop in the child like a portrait drawn from memory, to which the charm and intensity of regret are super-added. I recognized the kindly jesting smile, the tender yet proud eyes, prouder even than those of Madeleine, the severe yet benevolent mouth that would know well how to say 'no' when needful, and all the uprightness of the grandmother, her courage and firmness.

"Nevertheless the future frightened me. My granddaughter could not always be kept in ignorance of her and our misfortune. There are circumstances when the registers at the *Mairie* are thrown open, and in those of Etiolles she is entered with this sad notice, 'of unknown father.' For us Cécile's marriage was the moment to be dreaded. What would happen should she fall in love with a man who, on learning the truth, should draw back sooner than marry an illegitimate child, the daughter of a forger?

" 'She shall love us only. She will not marry,' said the grandmother. Was it possible? And how would it be when we were no longer there? What a sadness and what a danger with such beauty to go through life without a protector! And yet, what was to be done? Such an exceptional destiny could only be united to one equally exceptional. But where find it? It could not be in a village where the intimate life of each family is as exposed to view as an espalier in full sunshine, where all are acquainted and keep watch, pass judgment on each other. In Paris we know no one, and besides Paris is an abyss. Just then your mother came and settled herself in the

neighbourhood. We all believed her married to that fellow d'Argenton; but when I began to see more of you, Archambault's wife secretly warned me of the irregularity of the establishment. It was a flash of light for me. I said to myself on seeing you: 'There is the husband for Cécile!' From that moment I considered you as my grandson, I began to teach you, to train you.

"Oh! when after the lesson was over, I saw you together in a corner of the surgery, so happy and so united; you, stronger and older than she; she, already more sensible than you, I was filled with emotion and tender pity at the thought of the growing attachment that was drawing you closer. And the more Cécile laid bare to you her simple little soul, the more your intelligence developed and turned, eager to learn, towards great and beautiful subjects, the more proud and satisfied I was with my plan. I had foreseen everything in my mind. I fancied I saw you at the age of twenty coming to say to me:

" 'Grandfather, we love one another.'

"And my reply:

" 'Indeed you do well to love each other and with all your hearts, poor little outcasts that you are, for all through life you must be all in all to one another.'

"That was why you beheld me so fearfully enraged when that man insisted on making a mechanic of you. It seemed to me that it was my child, my Cécile's husband, who was torn away from me. All my wonderful plan fell through, thrown from the same heights as those from which they plunged you into work. How I have cursed them, all those madmen with their humanitarian notions! Nevertheless, I yet kept some hope. I said to myself: 'Hard trials to begin with sometimes turn out men of the finest metal. If Jack can get the better of

his unhappiness, if he reads enough, if he keeps the ideal in his brain while his arms are at work, he will still remain worthy of the wife I intend for him.' The letters we received from you, so tender and elevated in thought, confirmed me in these ideas. Cécile and I used to read them together, and talk of you every day.

"All at once came the news of that theft. Ah! my boy, I was horror-struck. What anger I felt against your mother's weakness, against the tyranny of that monster who had caused your fall, by setting you in such a dangerous path. Nevertheless, I respected the sympathy and tenderness that existed for you in my child's heart. I had not the courage to undeceive her, waiting till she should be older, her reason more established, so that she might the better bear her first disappointment. Besides, I knew well by the example of her mother, that some soils are of such strength that whatever is planted therein takes ineradicable root, and fortifies itself against all resistance. I felt you were rooted in that little heart, and I counted on time and oblivion to dislodge you. Well! it was not to be done,—nothing availed. I became aware of it the day after I met you at the keeper's hut, when I announced to Cécile that you would visit us the next day. If you could have seen her eyes brighten, and how she worked all day! With her that is always a sign; great emotions show themselves by greater activity, as if her heart, beating too hastily, had need of the movement of pen or needle to regulate its action.

"Now then, Jack, attend to me. You love my child, do you not? Your business is now to win her, to gain her, by emerging from the condition into which your mother's shortsightedness has sunk you. I have been watching you closely during these two months; the moral

and physical states are equally satisfactory. Therefore this is what I propose : study medicine, you shall succeed me at Etioilles. At first I had thought of keeping you here, but I have reflected that it will take you four years of hard work to become *officier de santé*,* which is all that is necessary in a country place, and during that time your presence would revive in the neighbourhood the sad story that I have just related you. Then also it is hard on an honest man not to gain his own livelihood. In Paris, you can divide your life into two parts ; workman by day, in the evening you must study in your room or attend the medical lectures that make Paris the studious and learned town it is. Every Sunday we shall expect you. I will inspect your week's work, I will direct it, and the sight of Cécile will give you strength. I have not the least doubt of your success, and that it will soon be attained. What you are about to undertake, Velpeau and others have done before you. Will you try? Cécile is the goal."

Jack felt so moved, so troubled, what he had heard was so touching and so extraordinary, the perspective opened to him appeared so enchanting that he could not find a word to say, and for all reply, flung his arms round the neck of the worthy man.

But a doubt and a fear yet tormented him. Perhaps Cécile only felt for him the affection of a sister. And then four years was a long time, would she consent to wait?

"By Jove ! my boy," said Monsieur Rivals, gaily, "those are matters altogether personal ; as to which I can say nothing ; but I give you leave to find out for yourself.

* An *officier de santé* has only been through some of the examinations for a medical degree.

She is upstairs. I heard her go up just now. Go and speak to her."

Speak to her! It was difficult, indeed. Only try the experiment of speaking one word, when your heart beats till it nearly bursts, and emotion chokes your utterance.

Cécile was writing in the surgery. Never had she appeared to Jack so beautiful, or so imposing, not even when he had seen her for the first time after seven years of absence. But what a change there was in him since that day! Restored moral beauty ennobled his features and removed from his gestures the timidity of their disgrace. He was not the less humble before her.

"Cécile," said he, "I am going away."

At this announcement she rose, very pale.

"I am going back to my hard work. But now my life has an object. Your grandfather allows me to tell you that I love you, and that I am going to work to win you."

He trembled so much and spoke so low, that any other than Cécile would not have understood what he said. But she heard him very well, and while in every corner of the great room the awakened past trembled in the rays of the setting sun, the maiden listened to this declaration of love, which seemed to her the echo of all her thoughts, all her dreams of the last ten years. And so singular a child was she, that instead of blushing and hiding her face, as in such a case all young persons properly brought up are known to do, she remained standing with a smile reflected in her eyes full of tears. She knew well that this love must be attended by many trials, by long waiting, by all the pangs of separation; but she strengthened herself in

order to give Jack courage. When he had finished explaining his plans to her—

“Jack,” she replied, giving him her faithful little hand, “I will wait four years for you, I will wait for ever for you, dear.”



IV.

THE MATE.



"You may count upon me, Madame Weber."



"I SAY, la Balafre, you don't know of anything in the iron line, do you? Here's a lad just off the steamers who wants a job." He who was addressed as la Balafre, a long devil in a cap and pea-jacket,

his face crossed by a long scar bearing witness to some former accident, approached the counter, for it is nearly always at the wine shop that this touting for jobs takes

place, looked the workman thus presented to him up and down from head to foot and felt his biceps :

“ A little wanting in muscle,” said he with a dogmatical air ; “ but if he has been in the stoking line—”

“ Three years,” said Jack.

“ Well ! that proves that you are stronger than you look. Go to Eyssendeck, the great firm in the Rue Oberkampf. They are wanting journeymen at the shears and the coining-press. You can tell the foreman that la Balafre sent you. Now then, if you will pay for a noggin of a bottle.” *

Jack paid for the noggin as requested, went off to the address just given him, and an hour later, having been engaged by Eyssendeck at five shillings a day, he marched down the Rue du Faubourg-du-Temple with brightened eye and free step, in search of a lodging that should not be too far from the works. Evening was falling but the street was full of animation for it was Monday—a usual holiday now in all the more remote quarters, and there was an uninterrupted throng circulating to and from the town on the long sloping road. The open public-houses were so full that their customers overflowed on to the pavement. Beneath the great *porte cochères* the carts and drays, unharnessed and with turned up shafts, announced the end of the day's toil. What a tumult there was, especially beyond the canal,—what a swarming on that rough steep roadway, torn up beforehand, ready for revolutions, by the little handcarts that incessantly riddled it running alongside the gutters, freighted with victuals, with low-priced vegetables and fish, a peripatetic market in which the workmen—poor souls, whose daily labour

* There is the noggin of the quart, and the noggin of the bottle : the latter by far the more aristocratic.

kept them away from their homes—bought the family supper a moment only before preparing it! And there were market cries, cries of Paris—some cheerful, rising to shrill notes, others so drawling and monotonous, that they seemed heavily to drag along the weight of the wares they proclaimed:

“ Young pigeons ! ”

“ Dabs to fry! to fry ! ”

“ Watercress six farthings a bunch ! ”

In the midst of this animated scene Jack moved on, his head upraised to spy out in the scant daylight left, the yellow placard of lodgings to let. He was happy, full of courage, valiant with hope, impatient to begin the double life of workman and student that he was about to undertake. He was pushed and jostled but did not perceive it. He did not feel the cold of this December evening, did not hear the untidy little work girls say to each other as they passed him: “There’s a good looking fellow.” Only all the great suburb seemed in sympathy with his gaiety and his self confidence, and encouraged him with that persistent good humour which is the foundation of the careless and easy Parisian character. At this moment, the tattoo sounding along the road, dropped into the middle of the crowd a serried group hardly distinct, with the beat of regular footsteps and a little music, a vivacious *Angelus* on the bugle, which the street boys accompanied in whistling. And the faces of all glowed with the alertness of this note thrown amid the surrounding fatigue.

“What a happiness it is to live! How I will work,” thought Jack as he walked along. Suddenly he bumped against a great basket, square as an organ, filled with felt hats and caps. The sight of this hamper leaning against

the wall recalled to his mind the strange physiognomy of Bélisaire. The basket alone resembled him ; but what completed the likeness, was that it stood at the entrance of a stall which smelled of leather and beeswax and exposed to view in its narrow window, several rows of strong soles adorned with solid and shining nails.

Jack remembered the never ceasing sufferings of his friend the hawker, his unfulfilled dream of a shoe made to his own measure ; and looking into the shop, he actually saw the grotesque and clownish outline of the hat seller, as ugly as ever, but evidently cleaner and better dressed. Jack was sincerely delighted at meeting him again, and after having vainly knocked at the pane two or three times, he entered without being noticed by the hawker, who was absorbed in the contemplation of a pair of shoes that the shopman was just showing him. It was not for himself that he was buying shoes ; it was for a tiny child of four or five years old, pale and puffy, whose enormous head was painfully balanced on very narrow shoulders. While the shoemaker tried on the boots, Bélisaire talked to the child with his kindly smile.

"That's comfortable, my pet, isn't it? Who will have nice warm tootsies after this? My little friend Weber, eh?"

The apparition of Jack did not seem to surprise him in the least.

"Hah ! so here you are !" he said as coolly as though he had seen him the evening before.

"Good day, Bélisaire ; what are you about there? Is that little boy yours?"

"Oh no! It is Madame Weber's child," answered the hawker with a sigh that evidently meant : "I wish it were mine."

He added, turning to the shopman :

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“ You have given him plenty of room, I hope ? So that his toes have free play. One is so miserable in boots that hurt ! ”

And the poor fellow looked at his own feet with despair, showing clearly that though he was rich enough to have boots made to measure for Madame Weber's little boy, he had not yet means enough to order the same for himself.

At last, when he had asked the child twenty times over whether the boots were comfortable, when he had made him walk and stamp his feet on the ground, the hawker with difficulty drew from his pocket a long red woollen purse with sliding rings, and took therefrom a few pieces of silver which he put into the shopkeeper's palm with that thoughtful, important air, that the lower classes assume when it is a question of paying money.

When they were outside :

“ Which way are you going, mate ? ” he asked Jack in a significant tone as if he would wish it to be understood : “ If you are going this way, I will take the other. ”

Jack, who felt this coldness without being able to explain it, replied :

“ Well ! I really don't know where I am going, I am journeyman at Eyssendeck's, and I am looking for a lodging not too far from my work. ”

“ At Eyssendeck's ! ” said the hawker who knew all the manufactories of the suburb ; “ it's not easy to get in there. One must have good certificates. ”

He winked as he looked at Jack to whom the words : “ Good certificates ” were a complete enlightenment. Bélisaire was under the same mistake as Monsieur Rivals. He too, believed him to have stolen the six thousand francs. So true is it that such accusations, even when their falsity has been acknowledged, leave an indelible stain. When, however Bélisaire learnt what had passed

at Indret, when he had seen the manager's declaration, his physiognomy changed at once and his delightful grimace of a smile illumined his grimy face as in the good old times :

“ Look here Jack, it is late now to be hunting up a lodging for the night. You shall come with me, for I am on my own hook now and I have a great big room where you can sleep tonight—yes, I say, yes ; I have even a famous plan to propose to you—But we will talk of it as we are eating. Come, forward, on ! ”

Behold them then—all three, Jack, the hawker and Madame Weber's little boy, whose new shoes made a famous noise on the pavement, going up the suburb on the Ménilmontant side where Bélisaire lived in the Rue des Panoyaux. As they went along he related to Jack how, his sister at Nantes having become a widow, he had returned to Paris with her ; that he no longer travelled the provinces and that trade was not doing so badly after all. From time to time, in the middle of his story he interrupted himself to utter his cry of *Hats, hats, hats !* on his usual beat, where he was known by all the manufactories. Before the end of the journey, he was obliged to take Madame Weber's child in his arms, for it was gently murmuring and complaining.

“ Poor little fellow,” said Bélisaire, “ he is not accustomed to walk. He never goes out, and it is to permit of his coming sometimes with me, that I have had this fine pair of shoes made to his measure. The mother is out all day long. She is a bread carrier by trade, and a very tiring trade it is ; and a good brave woman she is. She starts at five in the morning, carries bread till noon, comes in to eat a bit, and then is off again to the bakery till evening. The child stops indoors all that time. A neighbour looks after him—and when no one has time to

mind him, he is tied to his chair in front of the table, because of the matches. There, here we are."

They entered one of those vast workman's dwelling-houses, pierced by hundreds of narrow windows and traversed by long passages, in which the poor people establish their cooking-stores, hang up their clothes, all the overflow of their restricted space. The doors opened on to this side gallery, disclosing a view of rooms full of smoke and crying children. At this hour, everyone was dining. Jack as he passed, saw people at tables lighted by one candle only, or heard the rattle of the coarse crockery on the wood of the tables.

"Good appetite to you, pals," said the hawker.

"Good evening, Bélisaire!" replied cheerful, friendly voices from full mouths. In some other rooms the sight was a sadder one. No fire, no light; a wife, children watching for the father's return, and whatever remained of his Saturday pay.

The hawker's rooms being on the sixth floor at the end of the passage, Jack saw all these miserable artisan interiors, crowded together like the cells of a hive, of which his friend occupied the summit. Honest Bélisaire seemed, however, very proud of his lodging.

"You will see how comfortably I am settled, Jack, what lots of room I have. Only, wait a moment. Before we go in, I must take the little one back to Madame Weber."

He searched in front of the door next his own for the key hidden under the straw mat, opened it like a man well acquainted with the habits of the place, went straight to the stove, where the evening's soup had been simmering since mid-day, lighted the candle and then, when he had tied the child in his high chair before the table, and had given him two saucepan-lids to play with:

"Now," said he, "let us be off quick. Madame Weber will be in directly, and I am curious to know what she will say when she sees the child's new shoes. It will be good fun. The thing is, she will never be able to guess where they come from, there is no way for her to guess. There are so many people in the house, and everyone is so fond of her! Ah! we shall have some fun."

He chuckled, as he opened the door of his room, a long strip, with sloping roof, divided in two by a sort of glazed alcove. Caps and hats piled in heaps proclaimed the business of the occupant, and the bareness of the walls, his poverty.

"Hullo! Bélisaire," said Jack, "you don't live, then, with your people now?"

"No," answered the hawker with a shade of embarrassment, and according to his habit in such a case, scratching his head.—"You know, large families don't always agree. Madame Weber thought it was not fair that I should work for all, without ever gaining anything for myself. She advised me to live by myself. The result is, that I now earn double; I can support my relations and put by something for myself. It is to Madame Weber that I owe all this. She is a woman with a head on her shoulders, I can tell you!"

While he talked, Bélisaire prepared his lamp, put away his goods and busied himself with the dinner—a superb salad of potatoes, seasoned with red herrings, in which he had been digging steadily for the last three days, and which had now become a pickle of most powerful flavour. From a deal cupboard he drew two figured plates, a tin dish, another of wood, some bread and wine, a bunch of radishes, and arranged the whole on a cranky sideboard, made, like the cupboard, by a joiner of the neighbourhood. The hawker was, however,

as proud of his furniture as of his room, and would speak of THE SIDEBBOARD, THE CUPBOARD, as if they were ideal types of furniture.

"Now," he said, "we can fall to," and with triumphant air he pointed to his table ready laid in the most approved style, with a newspaper spread by way of a cloth, setting its "General News" under Jack's plate, and the "political bulletin," between the salt and the radishes. "To be sure it can't compare with that famous ham you once gave me down in the country. Lord! that was a ham! Never have I eaten anything like it."

Flattery apart, the potatoes were excellent too, and Jack did justice to them. Bélisaire, delighted at his guest's appetite, valiantly kept him company, fulfilling the while his duties as master of the house, and getting up at every moment to superintend the water boiling on the cinders, or, to grind the coffee between his crooked knees.

"I say, Bélisaire," observed Jack, "you are furnished with everything one could want to set up house-keeping."

"Oh! there are several things that don't belong to me; Madame Weber lends them till——"

"Till when, Bélisaire?"

"Till we are married," said the hawker, bravely, but with two spots of red on his cheeks. Then seeing that Jack did not laugh at him, he went on: "This marriage has been agreed upon between us for some little time; it is a great happiness for me, and a very unexpected one, that Madame Weber should have consented to marry again. She was so unhappy with her first, a scoundrel who drank and beat her when he was drunk. As if it were not a sin to raise a hand on such a fine woman! You will see her soon when she comes in. And so courageous, so good!

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Ah! I can answer for it I shan't beat her, and if she wishes to beat me, I shall let her do it."

"And when do you intend to set up together?" asked Jack.

"Ah! that's just it. I should like it to be at once, but Madame Weber, who is reason personified, thinks that at the present price of provisions we are not rich enough to start housekeeping by ourselves, and she wants to find a mate."

"A mate?"

"Why yes! It is often done in our suburb by the poorer folk. A mate, bachelor or widower is sought, to lighten the expenses of food and lodging. You can imagine what an economy it is for all parties! What is enough for two is enough for three. The difficulty is to find a good mate; a steady, hard-working fellow, who will not upset the household."

"Well! and why not me, Bélisaire? Should you think me steady enough? Should I do for you?"

"Really Jack, would you agree to it? I have been longing to make the proposal to you for the last hour but did not dare to."

"Why not?"

"Hang it! we are so poor. We shall live so economically, perhaps our fare would be too simple for a mechanic earning his five or six shillings a day."

"No, Bélisaire, no, the fare will never be too simple for me. I, too, must economize as much as possible and be as careful as I can, for I, too, am thinking of getting married."

"Really? but then you won't do," said the hawker dismayed.

Jack laughed and explained that his marriage could not take place for four years, and even then only on condition that he worked hard.

“Well, then, it is settled. You shall be our mate, and a good and true one. What a lucky chance, all the same, to have met again! And to think that if I had not had the idea of buying the child those shoes.—Hush! Listen! There is Madame Weber coming in. We shall have some fun.”

A terribly man-like step, vigorous and hasty, shook the staircase and the banister. The child heard it beyond a doubt, for he uttered a bleating like a young calf and hammered his saucepan lids on the table.

“There, there, my pet! Don’t cry, my darling,” cried the bread-carrier, shouting consolation to her child from the end of the corridor.

“Listen,” said Bélisaire very low. They heard a door open, then an exclamation, followed by a burst of young and hearty laughter. Bélisaire’s face all this time was wrinkled and puckered with delight.

This noisy gaiety, that the thinness of the partition spread all around the landing, came nearer to the two friends, and at last found its way into the garret in the shape of a big and vigorous woman of the people, some thirty or thirty-five years of age, clad in one of the long blue smocks with a bib with which the bread-carriers protect themselves from the flour. That worn by Madame Weber set off a robust and well-made figure.

“Ah! you jolly humbug!” said she as she entered with the child on her arm, “it is you who have played me this trick, I know. Just look how well my boy is shod!” And she laughed again and again with something like a tear in the corner of each eye.

“Isn’t she a clever one, eh?” said Bélisaire, laughing also till his sides ached. “How could she guess it was I?”

When this great joy was a little calmed down Madame

Weber sat down to the table, took a cup of coffee in something that might very well have been an old mustard-pot, and then only was Jack presented to her as the future mate. I must own that she at first received the idea with a certain reserve ; but when she had thoroughly examined the aspirant to this supreme distinction, when she learned that Bélisaire and Jack had known each other for the last ten years, and that she saw before her the hero of the famous ham story which had been so often related to her, her face lost its expression of distrust, and she held out her hand to Jack.

“Come, I can see that this time Bélisaire has not made a mistake. Since you know him, you know what a good-natured simpleton he can be. He has already brought me some half-dozen mates to look at, the very best of whom was not worth the rope to hang him with. By dint of being good, he is really stupid. I wish I could tell you all they have made him suffer in his own family ! He was the victim, the beast of burden ; he supported everyone and got nothing but abuse in return.”

“Oh ! Madame Weber !” said the worthy hawker, who did not like to hear his family ill-spoken of.

“Well ! Oh Madame Weber ? I must explain to the mate why I separated you from all the lot ; without that it would look as if I had acted from interest merely, as so many women do. Come, now ! aren’t you happier now that you live alone and that your work brings you in some return ?”

She continued, addressing herself to Jack : “Notwithstanding all I can do, they make all they can out of him. They send him the youngest ones, for there is a whole swarm of curly-headed children there, with fingers as hooked already as those of that old Jew, papa Bélisaire. They come here when I am out and always manage to

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carry off something. I tell you all this Jack that you may help me to protect him against others and himself, for the rogue is by far too warm hearted."

"You may count upon me, Madame Weber."

Then they busied themselves with arrangements for the mate. It was agreed that until the marriage he should live with Bélisaire and sleep in the larger division of the room on a pallet bed. The meals were to be taken together, and Jack was to pay his share of bed and board every Saturday. After the wedding they would see about a larger apartment, a little nearer also to the Eyssendeck works.

While these weighty questions were being discussed, Madame Weber, with her child asleep on her arm, made ready the mate's bed, put away the dinner things, and washed up the crockery; Bélisaire set himself to sewing hats, and Jack, not to lose a moment, piled Dr. Rivals' books in a corner of the deal sideboard, as if to take possession of his place in this nest of workers and put himself in hearty unison with the honest folk who surrounded him.

A few days before, while he was still at Etiolles, he would have been greatly astonished had any one told him that he would recommence his workman's life with ardour, without feeling the humiliation or fatigue of it, and would return to his hell with a light heart. Yet this was the case. Yes, it was indeed a hell to be traversed for the second time, but at the further end was Eurydice patiently awaiting him, draped in her bridal veil; he knew it, and this goal for his efforts and labours made the road easy to him.

His new workshop of the rue Oberkampf recalled Indret to him on a smaller scale. Here, space being precious, there were, in the same shop, three stages of

benches and machines. Jack was placed on the top stage, high up beneath a glazed roof, where all the noises of the workshop, its steam and its dust, met in mingled confusion. When he leant against the railing that protected the gallery in which he worked, he looked down upon the swarming human tools below, the smiths at their forges, the mechanics at their work, and lower down, clothed in blouses that gave them the look of young apprentices, women occupied with the more delicate details of the work.

The heat was suffocating, far more so than at Indret, where open space surrounded the over-heated workshops, and the sea-breeze refreshed the air; here, on the contrary, the great building was squeezed between other factories, and its windows faced in the narrow street those of other wearying trades. It mattered nothing now; Jack was sufficiently inured to fatigue to support anything; he felt himself as high above all the difficulties and grievances of his condition as he was, at the works, above the crowd of workers, whose toil reached his ears as in the sonorous vaulting of a cathedral. He thought of himself as only a bird of passage, doing his work conscientiously but with thoughts that were always elsewhere.

The other men soon perceived this. They saw him live apart from them, indifferent to their quarrels or their rivalries. The conspiracies against the foremen and the overseer, the fights as they poured out of the works, the new-comers paying their footing, the long dawdling in the *assommoirs*, the *consolations*, the *mines à poivre*,\* in all these Jack had no part; he shared neither their pleasures nor their hatreds. He did not hear the low mutter of

\* All slang terms for drinking-houses.

discontent, the dull growl of this great suburb lost like a Ghetto in the sumptuous city, which by the contrast of its rags, only heightened the splendour of the surrounding luxury. He did not hear the socialist theories that misery whispers in the ear of those unhappy creatures, who, in their utter destitution, live too near those endowed with abundance not to wish for a general upset that should suddenly transform the squalor of their fate. History and politics, as expounded over the bar counter by La Balafre, big Louis, or François la Bouteille, left him equally indifferent, for the history was a jumble taken from penny dreadfuls, novels or plays of Dumas, and all its heroes from the Ambigu theatre. It cannot be said that his comrades had any friendship for him, but they respected him. On the first attempt at a coarse joke, he had responded by so keen and clear a glance of determination from his light eyes, that the jesters were silenced at once; and then all knew that he had been a stoker, and the battles fought with clinker-bars among these men are notorious in the mechanics' world.

In the eyes of the men, this was enough to make him almost popular; in the eyes of the women he was possessed of another prestige, that aureola of light which surrounds those who love and are loved. With his tall and elegant figure, kept erect now by an impulse of will, and his neat appearance, he seemed to the work-girls, who had all read the *Mysteries of Paris*, a Prince Rudolph in search of a *Fleur-de-Marie*.

As he crossed their corner of the shop, which was kept alive with their gossip, and the dramas which ensued; for as nearly every one of them had a lover at the works, the jealousies, ruptures, and scenes were perpetual, the poor girls wasted many a faded smile upon him. At the break-

fast hour while eating their scanty meal on the edge of the work-bench, the discussions would begin among these creatures, who, remaining women still, dressed their hair for the workshop as for a ball, and in spite of the iron filings and the stain of work, yet wore in their hair some ribbon or glittering pin, sole relic of coquetry.

On leaving the works, Jack went away quickly and always alone. He longed to reach his lodging, get rid of his blouse, and change his occupation. Surrounded by his books, little school books upon the margins of which his childhood had left many a mark, he began his evening's work, and was constantly surprised at the readiness of his memory and the way in which the least classical word would revive in his mind the old lessons he had learned. He found he knew more than he had thought. Sometimes, however, unexpected difficulties appeared between the lines; and it was touching to see the big fellow, whose hands were stiffened by his daily work at the press, exert himself in his attempts at holding a pen, and at times in a moment of angry powerlessness toss it away. Beside him, Bélisaire sat sewing the peaks of his caps or the straw of his summer hats in a religious silence; the stupefaction of a savage assisting at the incantations of a magician. It was he who perspired at Jack's efforts, grew impatient, gave it up, and when the mate had succeeded in getting through some difficult passage, it was he who nodded his head with the air of a conqueror. The noise of the hawker's coarse needle running through the thick straw, the student's pen scratching on the paper, his great dictionaries moved with heavy sound, filled the garret with a healthy and peaceful atmosphere of work, and when Jack raised his eyes, he saw behind the panes the gleam of labour lighting lamps, of active shadows bravely prolonging their evening's work, all the reverse

side of a Paris night, all that shines in the depths of its courtyards while its boulevards are blazing with light.

Towards the middle of the evening, Madame Weber, when her child was put to bed and fallen asleep, would come and work with the two friends in order to economize coal and oil. She mended her child's clothes and those of Bélisaire and the mate. It was agreed that the marriage should not take place till the spring, winter being for the poor a season of anxiety and extra expense. Meanwhile, the two lovers worked courageously side by side, which is after all one way of paying court. It was already the household of three that they had planned; but it appeared to Bélisaire that something was yet wanting, for seated by the side of the bread-carrier, he assumed attitudes of melancholy, emitted deep and hoarse sighs, such as naturalists have remarked that the great African turtle heaves beneath his huge shell during the pairing season. From time to time he made furtive attempts to take Madame Weber's hand and hold it for a little in his own, but she thought this retarded work, and they contented themselves with plying their two needles in measured time, talking the while in low tones with the hissing sound peculiar to common voices held in restraint by their owners.

Jack took care not to turn round, for fear of embarrassing them, and, as he wrote, thought to himself: "How happy they are!"

He was happy only on Sunday, the day when he went to Etiolles. Never did any coquette pay as much attention to her toilet as did Jack on this great day, by the light of the lamp which was lit at five o'clock in the morning. Madame Weber would prepare his white shirt for him and lay his gentleman's suit over the back of a chair. And great in request were lemon and pumice-

stone to take away the marks of work. He wished that nothing might remind him of the hired workman he was during all the week. The work-girls at Eyssendeck's might indeed have taken him for Prince Rudolph had they seen him start for Etioilles.

What a heavenly day of happiness! It was not composed like other days of hours and minutes! The whole household looked for his coming and welcomed him, even the fire blazing in the dining-room, the bunches of greenery on the mantel-piece, the gaiety of the Doctor and the emotion of Cécile, on whose face the mere presence of her lover shed, as a kiss might have done, a wide-spreading blush. As of old, he took his lesson before her as when they were children, and the intelligent glance of the young girl encouraged him and helped his comprehension. Monsieur Rivals corrected the week's exercises, explained them, set him others; and herein the master was as full of persevering courage as the pupil, for the Sunday afternoon, ordinarily kept free by the old Doctor save for unforeseen visits, was almost exclusively devoted to turning over the books of his youth, for the purpose of marking and annotating them for the use of a beginner. The lesson finished, when the weather permitted they went for a turn in the shivering and crackling forest, where under the trees stripped of leaves and rimed with frost, the rabbits and the roe-deer ran hither and thither across the open.

It was the best moment of the day.

The worthy Doctor, expressly slackening his pace, would allow the young people to pass before him, and they, arm in arm, with quick and vivacious step would walk on and communicate to each other the mutual confidences which his naïve simplicity embarrassed not a little. He would have set them too quickly at their ease,



and they were still lingering over those happy moments of love, when it is divined rather than expressed in words. Although they spoke to each other only of the week that was past, yet the long silences that broke their conversation, were the music, the discreet but passionate accompaniment of this opera for two voices.

To enter that part of the forest called the Grand Sénart, they had to pass Les Aulnettes, where Doctor Hirsch continued to come from time to time to make experiments on the therapeutics of perfumes. One would have thought all the herbs of the forest and the fields were being burnt there, so thick was the smoke that rose from the roof, so fiercely did it seize upon one's throat with its aromatic bitterness.

"Ah! ah! The poisoner has come," Monsieur Rivals would say to the young people. "Do you smell his devil's cookery?"

Cécile tried to keep him quiet :

"Take care, grandfather; he might hear you."

"Let him hear me! Do you suppose I am afraid of him? No danger of his stirring, I know! From the day when he tried to prevent me from getting at our friend Jack, he has known that old Rivals still has a pretty strong arm."

But notwithstanding all he said the young people talked lower, walked quicker as they passed "*Parva domus*." They felt that nothing favourable to them could come from there, and seemed instinctively to feel the venomous glance of Doctor Hirsch entrenched behind his closed shutters. After all, what had they to fear from the spying of this absurd puppet? Was not everything at an end between d'Argenton and Charlotte's son? For the last three months, they had seen nothing of each other and lived apart, separated by a constant thought of hatred

which parted them each day further from each other, like two shores that the tide carves out in moving ceaselessly between them. Jack loved his mother too much to have any ill-will against her because she had a lover ; but since his own love for Cécile had taught him dignity, he hated his mother's lover, making him responsible for the fault of the weak woman, who was riveted to her chains by the very violence and tyranny that would have repelled a proud and independent soul. Charlotte, who hated scenes and explanations, had given up all attempts to reconcile these two men. She no longer spoke to d'Argenton of her son ; only secretly, she appointed meetings with the latter.

Two or three times even she had come closely veiled in a cab to the works in the rue Oberkampf and asked for Jack ; who had been seen by his companions standing at the cab door, talking with a woman still young and of a rather loud style of elegance. The rumour was spread that he had a famously smart mistress. He was complimented ; it was supposed to be one of those strange but not unfrequent *liaisons*, by which certain fair rolling-stones, started from the suburb, return, when rich and well set up in life, to their native gutter. Sometimes it has been brought about by meeting in a dancing saloon, whither Madame has gone by way of fashionable frolic, or the meeting may have chanced on the road to some races that has lain through one of the poorer quarters. These workmen are better dressed than the others ; they have a "swell" appearance ; the haughty and absent glance of men who have been chosen as queens' favourites.

For Jack, these suspicions were doubly insulting, and without telling them to Charlotte, he endeavoured to prevent her coming, by alleging the rules of the workshop

forbidding all exit during the working hours. From that time they saw each other but rarely—from time to time in public gardens, but more frequently in churches, for like all her kind she was becoming devout as she grew older, by reason of an overflow of inactive sentimentality, and also by a taste for ceremonies and honours and a craving to satisfy her last vanities as a pretty woman, by kneeling gracefully on a *prie-Dieu* in front of the altar on sermon days. In these rare and brief interviews Charlotte talked all the time according to her habit, though with rather a sad and weary air. She, however, declared herself very content and happy, full of confidence in d'Argenton's literary future. But one day, at the end of one of these conversations, as they left the Panthéon church :

"Jack," she said with a shade of embarrassment, "could you— Just fancy, I do not know how I have managed so badly, but I have not enough money to carry me on to the end of the month. I dare not ask him for any, things are going so badly. He is quite ill from it, poor dear. If you could lend me for a few days—"

He did not let her finish. He had just received his pay, and put it into his mother's hand with the colour mounting to his face. Then in the full light of the street, he remarked what he had not been able to see in the gloom of the church,—traces of sorrow on that smiling face, a pallor marbled with red, in which all freshness was disappearing diluted in streamlets of tears. A great pity overwhelmed him.

"You know, mother, if you are unhappy, I am there. Come to me. I should be so proud, so happy, to have you with me!"

She started and trembled :

"No, no, it is impossible," she said in a low voice. "He is too much worried just now. It would be unworthy."

She left him hurriedly, as if she feared to yield to some temptation.



v.

JACK KEEPS HOUSE.



"Have I not settled it all quickly."



It is on a summer's morning at Ménilmontant, in the little lodging of the Rue des Panoyaux. The hawker and his mate are already up, although the day is but dawning. The one goes hobbling to

and fro, as noiselessly as he can, tidying, sweeping, blacking the boots; and it is wonderful to behold the

nimble dexterity of this clumsy-looking fellow, so careful not to disturb his valiant companion settled before the open window, under the early morning June sky, a tender blue sky with rosy tints, fantastically cut by the thousand chimneys of the suburban courtyard. When Jack lifts his eyes from his book, he can see in front of him the zinc roof of a great steel manufactory. When in a little while the sun darts its rays upon it, it will become a terrible mirror, throwing forth an insupportable reverberation. At the present moment, the dawning light is reflected in soft and vague tints, and the tall chimney rising up in the middle, strengthened by bars that unite it to the neighbouring roofs, looks like the mast of some ship sailing over heavy, shimmering waters.

Below, the cocks are crowing in the poultry-houses that tradesmen always manage to put up in the corner of a shed or garden. No other sound is heard till five o'clock strikes. Then a sudden call re-echoes :

“Ma'me Jacob, Ma'me Mathieu, here's the bread !”

It is Jack's neighbour beginning her rounds. Her apron full of many-sized loaves, still hot and sweet from the oven, she rapidly goes through the passages and stairs, and sets the bread upright in the angles of doors, by the side of the milk-cans, calling by name those of her customers for whom she acts as an alarum ; for she is always the first one up in the district.

“Here's the bread !”

It is the call to life, an eloquent and irresistible call. It is the staff of life, the terrible daily bread, so hard to earn, that makes the household happy, the table bright. There must be some for the father's wallet, for the child's little school-basket, for the morning's breakfast, and the evening's soup.

“Here's the bread ! here's the bread !”



The wooden tallies grate under the woman's long knife. Another notch, another debt,—hours of labour pledged before they are achieved. No matter! No other moment of the day brings with it such a sensation as this. It is the awakening of appetite, with its animal instinct, the mouth opened at the same time as the eyes. And at Madame Weber's rising or descending call, that is heard on every storey, the house awakens, the doors bang. The children set up triumphal screams, merrily rushing downstairs and climbing up again, clasping in their arms loaves bigger than themselves, with the gesture so habitual to poor people coming from the baker,—the gesture of a miser hugging his casket—conveying right well the important part that bread plays in their life.

Soon every one is astir. Opposite Jack, on the other side of the factory, the windows are opening; numberless windows,—all those that are lit up at night—now display the mysteries of their laborious poverty. At one, a sad-looking woman has seated herself and stitches away at a sewing-machine while her little girl hands her one by one some pieces of material. At another, a young woman, probably a shop-girl, already dressed, leans out to cut the bread that composes her frugal repast, fearful lest she should drop any crumbs on the freshly swept floor of her room. Further off, a little garret skylight catches the eye with a small mirror swinging from it; as soon as the sun rises a red curtain is drawn across it as a protection from the burning reverberation of the zinc roof. All these dwellings for the poor open at the back of an enormous house, on the side where the stairs wind round, where the house-slops are emptied, and where the crevasses and chimney-flues meander along the building. It is dingy and ugly. But the student is not depressed

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by it. Only one thing saddens him, it is the voice of an old woman, who each day at the same hour and in the same tone, throws out in the morning air which is still free from the noise of the street, a phrase ever the same and as distressing as a plaint: "People who are in the country in such weather as this must be happy indeed!" To whom does she say this, poor old soul? To no one and to every one, to herself, perhaps to the canary-bird she is hanging to her shutter in its cage decked with fresh chickweed, perhaps to the flower-pots set out in front of her window. Jack is quite of her opinion, and would willingly join in her lamenting regret, for his first thought, courageous and tender, ever flies off to a quiet little village street, to a little green door on which the words "Doctor's bell" are engraved on a brass plate. While he sits there dreaming, forgetful for a minute of his hard task, the rustle of a silk dress is heard in the passage, and the key turns in the lock.

"Turn it to the right!" says Bélisaire, who is busy making the coffee.

The key turns to the left.

"To the right, I tell you."

The key turns more and more to the left. The hawker, out of patience, coffee-pot in hand, opens the door, and Charlotte dashes into the room. Bélisaire, astounded at this invasion of flounces, feathers and laces, bows and scrapes, jumps enthusiastically about on his bow legs, while Jack's mother, failing to recognize the hairy, shaggy creature, apologizes and draws back towards the door.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur! I have made a mistake."

At the sound of this voice, Jack has raised his head and started forward.

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“No, indeed, mamma, you have not made a mistake.”

“Oh! my Jack, my Jack.”

She throws herself on his neck, seeking a shelter in his arms.

“Save me, Jack, protect me. That man, that vile being to whom I have given everything, for whom I have abandoned, sacrificed everything, my life, and that of my child! He has struck me, yes, he has beaten me. This morning, when he came home after two nights spent out, I ventured to make a remonstrance. I think I had a right. Then the wretch flew into a terrible rage, and raised his hand, struck me, struck me——”

The remainder of her speech was lost in an explosion of tears and desperate sobs. At the first words of the unhappy woman, Bélisaire discreetly retired, closing the door on this family scene. Jack, standing by his mother, gazed at her full of pity and sorrow. How altered she was! How pale! In the freshness of the early day and the sunlight that bathed the little room, the impress of time appeared more strongly marked upon her hollow cheeks, and a few grey hairs that she had not taken the trouble to hide, glistened on her temples. Without pausing to wipe her tears, she rapidly talked on, relating all her grievances against the man she had just left, without order, at haphazard, for they pressed and hurried to her lips, making her stammer :

“Oh! how I have suffered, my Jack, for the last ten years! How he has wounded, lacerated me! He is a monster, I tell you. He spends his life at the coffee-house, in taverns among low women. It is there that they now write their newspaper. And it is well done, indeed! The last number was so dull! You know, when he went to Indret, to take the money, I was there too, in the village opposite, and I wanted so much to see you! But

Monsieur would not allow me. How odious, was it not? He hates you so much, because you do not need him! That is what he cannot forgive you. And yet he reproaches us often enough for the very bread you ate at his house. He is so mean! Shall I tell you another thing he has done to you? I never, never intended to tell you; but to-day I must speak out. Well! I had ten thousand francs for you that *Bon Ami* gave me at the time of the Indret business. He put it all into his Review, yes, my dear, into his Review! Oh, I know he thought it would bring in a good interest, but those ten thousand have been swallowed up with many others, and when I asked him if he would return them to you, for in your position that money might be very useful to you, do you know what he did? He drew up a long list of all he had spent on you formerly, for your keep, your food at Etiolles, at the Roudics. It ran up to fifteen thousand francs. But, he said, he would not demand any further payment. How generous, eh? However, I had borne everything: his injustice, his cruelty, his fury and the hatred he always betrayed against you, the infamous manner in which he talked over the Indret business with his friends, as if your innocence had not been recognized, proclaimed. Yes, even that I bore with, for after all, nothing they could say could prevent my loving you, and thinking of you a hundred times a day. But to leave me two nights running, in all the pangs of expectation and jealousy, to prefer to me some theatrical woman, some abandoned lady of the faubourg Saint-Germain (it appears they are madly in love with him all these Comtesses), to receive my reproaches with disdainful airs, shrugging of shoulders, and in a fit of rage to strike me, me, Ida de Barancy! That was too much for my pride, for my self-respect. I dressed myself and put on my bonnet. Then I went up to him and said: 'Look well

at me, Monsieur d'Argenton, it is the last time in your life that you will see me. I am leaving you. I am going to my child. I hope, for your sake, you will find another Charlotte; as for me, I have enough of it!' Then I left, and here I am."

Jack listened to the end without interrupting her, getting paler and paler at each revelation of infamy, feeling so much shame for her sake at all she related, that he dared not look at her. When she had finished, he took her hand, and gently, tenderly, and gravely also, said:

"Thank you, dear mother, for having come to me. The happiness and dignity of my life lacked but one thing, and that was your presence. Now you are here, I shall have you, keep you; it is all that I longed for. Only, take care, I shall not let you leave me."

"Leave you! Return to that man! No, my Jack! With you, always with you, nothing but we two. You know I told you, the day might come when I should require you. Well, that day has come, I can assure you."

In the joy of her son's affection her agitation calmed down and was lost in big sighs, like a child that has sobbed itself asleep: "You will see, my Jack, what a charming existence we will lead together. I owe you such long arrears of affection and tenderness. I am going to pay my debt, do not fear. I cannot tell you how freely I breathe! Look! Your room is very mean, very bare, very ugly, a mere dog-kennel. Well! since I am in it, it seems to me that I have entered paradise."

This rather slighting appreciation of the lodging that Bélisaire and he thought magnificent, made Jack somewhat anxious about their future, but he had no time to dwell on this. He had barely half an hour before going off to the workshop, and he had so much to decide and settle, that he hardly knew where to begin. He first went

to consult the hawker, who was patiently pacing up and down the passage, and would have continued pacing there till the evening without once knocking to inquire if the explanation was ended.

"This is what has occurred, Bélisaire. My mother has come to live with me. How are we going to manage?" Bélisaire started as the idea immediately crossed his mind: "He will no longer be my mate. There's my wedding again put off." But he did not betray his disappointment, and devoted himself to help his friend out of his difficulty. They agreed that as their lodging was the best on that flat, Jack should occupy it with his mother, that the hawker should put his caps and hats in Madame Weber's room, and look out for a small room for himself in the house.

"It does not matter at all, not in the least," said the poor fellow, striving to assume an air of indifference. They went back into the room. Jack introduced his friend Bélisaire to his mother, and the hawker, on recognizing the beautiful lady of Les Aulnettes, placed himself at Ida de Barancy's disposal for the day. There was no longer any mention of Charlotte. It was necessary to hire a bed, two chairs, and a washstand. Jack drew from the drawer in which he kept his savings, three or four napoleons which he gave his mother.

"You know, mamma, if cooking bores you, Madame Weber will, on her return, cook the dinner."

"Certainly not. It is my concern. Monsieur Bélisaire will kindly show me the shops. I am going to be your housekeeper, and shall not unsettle anything in your life. You will see what a nice little dinner I shall give you, as it is too far from the workshop for you to return home for breakfast. Everything will be ready for your return."

She had already thrown off her shawl, tucked up her

sleeves and her long skirts, to set to work. Jack, delighted at seeing her so resolute, kissed her with all his heart and started off happier than he had ever been till now.

How courageously he worked that day, as he thought of the manifold responsibilities he had now assumed! His mother's painful situation had so often preoccupied him since he contemplated marriage. The thought of her had spoiled all his joy and his hopes. How much lower would that man drag her down? What would become of her? Sometimes shame overcame him at the thought of giving as mother-in-law to his beloved Cécile, this outcast of society, whom others than her son no doubt despised. Henceforth all was changed. Ida reclaimed, protected by the most attentive, the most tender love, would become worthy of her whom she would some day call "daughter." It seemed to Jack, that by this event alone, distance was lessened between his affianced and himself, and in his joy he handled the heavy press at the Eyssendeck factory with such spirit that his comrades noticed it:

"Just look at the '*Aristo*' up there, how happy he looks! Matters must be going on nicely with your sweetheart, eh? '*Aristo*.'"

"'Pon my word, yes," Jack replied laughingly.

He did nothing but laugh all day long. However, as soon as working hours were over, and he was returning homewards up the rue Oberkampf, a terrible fear seized upon him. Would he still find her in his room, she who had taken refuge there so hastily? He knew with what rapidity Ida fastened wings to her every caprice; and then the degrading passion the weak creature had always had for her chain, made him fear lest she should have yielded to the temptation of renewing it directly she had

broken it. With hasty strides he sped over the distance ; but the moment he set foot on the stairs, his fears were dispelled. Amid the varied noises of an artisan's house, a fresh voice rose in dazzling trills, warbling like a captive goldfinch in a new cage. Jack knew that clear re-echoing voice.

At the first step he took in his " dog kennel," he paused astonished. The room, now rid of Bélisaire's cargo, cleaned from top to bottom, and embellished by a fine bedstead and washstand hired by Ida, seemed transformed and larger. Great nosegays, bought from the street-barrows, were stuck in every vase, and a well-laid table looked gay with its white cloth and common crockery, a fine pie and a couple of bottles of good wine.

Ida was no longer the same person, with an embroidered white petticoat, a light-coloured dressing jacket, and a little cap stuck on her puffed-out hair, and over all, the radiant physiognomy of a pretty woman, consoled, rested, and happy.

" Well ! what do you say to that ? " cried Charlotte, running to greet him with open arms.

He kissed her.

" It's magnificent ! "

" Have I not settled it all quickly ? I must say Bel has helped me. What a good-natured fellow ! "

" Who did you say ? Bélisaire ? "

" Yes, my good Bel, and Madame Weber also. "

" Oh ! oh ! I see you are already fast friends. "

" I should think so ! They are so amiable, so obliging ! I have invited them to dine with us. "

" The deuce ! And how about plates ? "

" You see, I have bought some, very few. The people next door have lent me some spoons and forks. They are also very good-natured, those Levindrés. "



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Jack, who was not aware he had such obliging neighbours, opened his eyes wide.

"That is not all, my Jack. You have not looked at the pie. I went to buy it in the Place de la Bourse, at a shop I know of, where they cost sevenpence less than anywhere else. It is a long way off, however. I was completely done, and obliged to take a cab to come home."

It was just like her. Eighteenpence of cab hire to save sevenpence! Moreover, it was evident she knew all the best places. The rolls came from the Viennese bakery, the coffee and dessert from the Palais Royal.

Jack listened, dumbfounded. She saw his impression, and ingenuously inquired:

"Perhaps I have spent a little too much, have I?"

"No, no."

"Yes, I see I have by your manner. How could I help doing so? So many things were wanting here, and then we do not meet again every day. However, you shall see how disposed I am to be reasonable."

She drew from a drawer a long green account book, and waved it triumphantly.

"Look at this fine account book I have just bought at Madame Lévêque's."

"Lévêque, Levindré! Why, you seem to have made acquaintance with the whole neighbourhood."

"Of course! Lévêque is the stationer next door,—a good-natured old woman who has also a circulating library. It is very convenient, for we must follow the literary movement. Meanwhile, I have purchased an account book. It was indispensable, you see, my dear child. In an orderly establishment you cannot get on without it. This evening, after dinner if you like, we will make up our accounts. You see, all is written down."

"Oh, well, if it is all written down——"

They were interrupted by the arrival of Bélisaire, Madame Weber, and the child with the large head. Nothing could be more comic than the familiar tone of protection with which Ida de Barancy addressed her new friends :

“I say, my good Bel, just do this ; Madame Weber, shut the door please, the little fellow is sneezing.”

Such grand manners, such an amiably dignified and queen-like attitude, such condescension by way of making these poor folk feel at home ! Madame Weber was, however, completely at ease. She was a worthy creature, not readily intimidated, conscientiously following her little trade, and relying on her own powers. The youthful Weber did not scruple either to cram himself with pie-crust. Bélisaire alone seemed out of spirits, and there was really good cause for his depression. To believe yourself within a fortnight of the happy day, to have your happiness within reach, and suddenly to see everything disappear in the probabilities of the future, is terrible ! From time to time he turned a melancholy eye on Madame Weber, who seemed to bear the loss of a mate very calmly, or towards the delighted Jack, taken up with waiting on his mother with lover-like attentions. Ah ! it may well be said, that this world's events are like the seesaws that children set up with a board, and which raise up one of the players, only on the condition of making the other feel the hardness and roughness of the soil. Jack was rising up towards light, while his poor comrade was falling from all his dreams back into the inexorable reality. To begin with, he who found his room so nice, who was so proud of it, was henceforth going to inhabit a kind of wood-closet opening out on the stairs. There was no other room on that storey, and on no account would Bélisaire increase the distance between Madame

Weber and himself, even by a flight of stairs. This being was called Bélisaire, but he should also have been called Resignation, Kindness, Devotion, Patience. He had thus the right to bear many noble appellations, which he did not take, nor boast of, but which were discovered little by little by those who knew him.

When their guests had left, and Jack and his mother were alone, she was much astonished to see him quickly clear the table and settle some big school books on it.

“What are you going to do?”

“You see, I am studying.”

“What are you studying?”

“Why, it’s true, you don’t know.”

Then he told her his heart’s secret, and the double existence he was leading, with the dazzling hope as goal. Till now he had not spoken of it. He was too well acquainted with her giddy brain, full of cracks and blanks, to confide to her his schemes of happiness. He dreaded the disclosure she would not have failed to make of them to d’Argenton; and the idea that his love-dream would be gossiped about in that house where he had only enemies, horrified and appalled him. He mistrusted the poet and his surroundings, and his happiness would have seemed to him jeopardized in their hands. Now, however, that his mother had returned to him, that he had her all to himself, he could enjoy the supreme happiness of talking to her about Cécile. Jack spoke of his love with the enthusiasm, the rapture of his youthful twenty years, with the eloquence born of the sincerity of his passion, and a maturity of impressions due to his past sufferings. Alas! his mother did not understand him. All the grandeur and seriousness revealed in the affection of this unhappy outcast was beyond her. Although very sentimental, love had not the same significance for her as for

him. In listening to him, she felt the same emotion as at the third act of a play, when the heroine, robed in white with pink ribbons, listens to her artificially-curled lover in a shooting-jacket. With outstretched head and open hands, pleasurably excited at the recital of this artless love that made her smile, she kept on repeating the while: "Oh! how pretty, how nice, what darlings you are! quite Paul and Virginia." She was especially struck by the unexpected, complicated and abnormal incidents of Cécile's history. At each moment she interrupted Jack: "You know it is a romance, quite a romance. One might write a novel upon it." This was the result of the intellectual circle she had frequented. Fortunately, lovers enjoy a providential immunity when relating their passion, and in the answers they receive, they hear generally only the echo of their own words. Jack revelled in his happy recollections, his past fears, his plans, his dreams, heedless of the preposterous interruptions of his mother, never perceiving that for her all this story was summed up in a commonplace impression like the burden of a ballad, and that she slightly pitied the ingenuous foolishness of the two little innocent sweet-hearts.

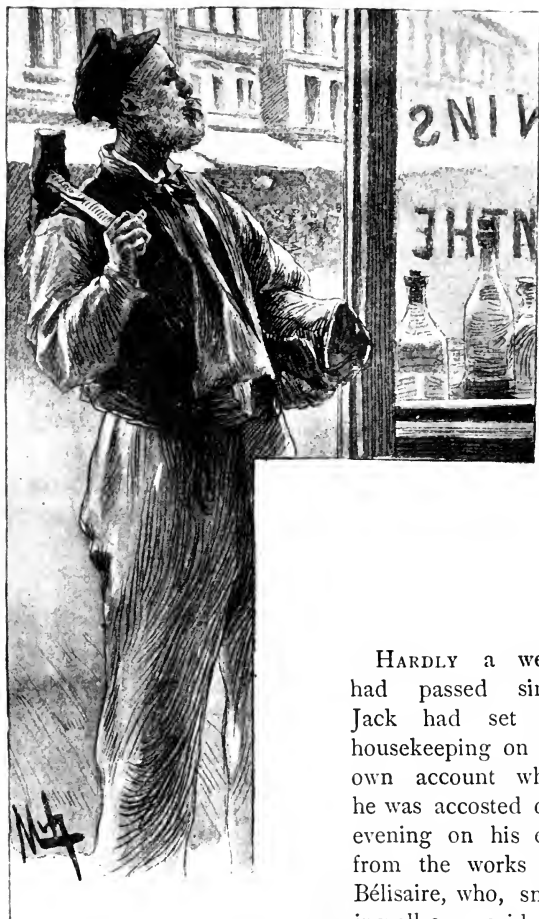


VI.

THE WEDDING OF BÉLISAIRE.



"Champagne ! Champagne !" The glasses were held out to him on his passage.



HARDLY a week had passed since Jack had set up housekeeping on his own account when he was accosted one evening on his exit from the works by Bélisaire, who, smiling all over, said :

“I am very happy, Jack. We have got a mate at last. Madame Weber has seen him, and says he will do. The matter is all settled. We are going to be married.”

It was high time. The unlucky fellow was literally pining away and growing thin as he saw the summer advancing, and knew that the arrival of the little chimney-sweeps and chestnut-sellers would still further postpone his happiness; for, to the hawker, the different seasons were personified by the nomads of the street, just as they are for country folk by the birds of passage. Too submissive to fate to complain, he uttered his cry of "*Hats, hats, hats,*" with sadness enough to draw tears. It is from such causes, no doubt, that springs the melancholy which on certain days the cries of Paris seem to express, lending to the indifferent words all the distresses and anxieties of ignored lives. The tone alone has a meaning in these never-varying cries. But only think how many ways there are of crying: "Old clo'," and consider whether the stout-hearted cry of the morning resembles that of the evening, the weary, disheartened, voiceless melody which by force of habit the street-hawker throws around him as he returns to his domicile. Jack, who had been the involuntary cause of his friend's grief, was nearly as delighted as he was at the good news he heard.

"Well done, I should like to see this mate too."

"There he is," said Bélisaire, pointing out to him a great fellow who stood a few steps behind him, in working dress, shirt sleeves, a hammer on his shoulder, a leathern apron rolled up under his arm. The face, remarkable for its somnolent air and the insignificance of its features, inflamed by a glow that told of the bottle, was half lost in an abundant beard: the tangled, stained, dirty beard of that quondam messmate of the Gymnase Moronval whom the "Failures" used to call "the man who has read Prudhon." If there is any conformity between a man's physical appearance and his character, Bélisaire's new mate, Ribarot by name, was not a bad man, but an idle


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one, solemn, pretentious, ignorant and drunken. Jack took good care not to communicate this disquieting impression to the hawker, who contemplated his new acquisition with great joy, repeatedly shaking him by the hand without rhyme or reason. Besides Madame Weber had given her approval, and this was the main point. It is true that the good woman had acted somewhat like Jack; seeing her sighing lover so rejoiced, she had not had the heart to be too hard to please in the matter, and passing over the unpromising exterior, she had put up with this mate for want of a better.

During the fortnight preceding his marriage, what joyous sounds of "*Hats! Hats!*" echoed through the workmen's courts of Ménilmontant, Belleville and Villette! The cry was gay and sonorous, the clear and triumphant cock crow of the morning, something like the "Hymen of Hymeneæ," of antiquity, translated into the language of ignorance. At last the day, the great day, arrived. In spite of all that Madame Weber could say, Bélisaire had decided to do things on a grand scale, and the steel rings of his long red woollen purse had been slid back to their farthest limit. The result was untold splendour, a wedding in a thousand!

Generally, among the *bourgeoisie*, one day is devoted to the civil marriage at the Mairie and another to the church ceremony, but the common folk having no time to lose, accumulate them, making one day do for both, and for this long and tedious business nearly always choose Saturday in order to have a good rest on the Sunday. The suburban Mairies are worth seeing on that special day. From early morning, a stream of pleasure vans and four-wheelers keeps rolling up to the doors, and the dusty passages are filled with more or less lengthy processions, waiting for hours in the great common hall. All the

wedding parties mingle, the groomsmen make each others acquaintance, take a drop of spirits together, the brides critically inspect each other, while the relations, bored with the long wait, talk among themselves in low tones ; for notwithstanding the bareness of its walls, the utter commonplace of its posted notices, the profound ugliness of it all, the municipality impresses these poor folk. The worn velvet of the benches, the loftiness of the rooms, the usher with his chain, the solemn deputy-mayor all amuse yet awe them. The law appears to them as some invisible great lady who receives them in her drawing-rooms. I must not fail to mention that among the innumerable processions that crossed the little courtyard of the Ménilmontant Mairie on that thrice happy Saturday, the wedding party of Bélisaire was one of the smartest, though it lacked that white bridal dress that sends all the women to the windows, and sets all the idlers of the streets in commotion. Madame Weber, being a widow, wore a dress of the most startling blue, that crude indigo dear to the heart of all those who love the useful ; a square flowered shawl folded over the arm, and a superb cap loaded with ribbons and flowers that fluttered above her shining and well washed Auvergnat countenance. She was accompanied by father Bélisaire, a little yellow old man, with a hooked nose, quick movements and perpetual attacks of coughing which his new daughter-in-law had all the difficulty in the world in relieving, by vigorously administered frictions on the back. These repeated rubbings sadly troubled the dignity of the wedding, interrupting its triumphal march at every moment while all the couples stood crowded together awaiting the end of the attack.

Bélisaire took the second place in the procession, giving his arm to his sister, the widow from Nantes, a sly looking

frizzle headed woman with as hooked a nose as her father. As for Bélisaire, his customers would not have known him. The wrinkle that acute pain furrowed on each side of his cheeks, the great blue vein that swelled in the middle of his forehead, the ever open mouth that seemed to say "aïe," without speaking it—all this had disappeared; with head erect, almost handsome, he proudly thrust forward, one before the other, a pair of enormous shining pumps, made to his own measure expressly for him, so large and so long, that they gave him the look of an inhabitant of the Zuyder-Zee shod in his winter snow-shoes. No matter! Bélisaire was no longer in pain, he had a delightful illusion of owning a pair of perfectly new feet, and a double happiness beamed upon his face. By the hand he held Madame Weber's child whose great head was made still larger by one of those extravagant specimens of hair frizzing of which only the hairdressers of the suburb have the secret. The Mate, who had been persuaded with the utmost difficulty to quit even for a day his hammer and his leathern apron; the baker who employed Madame Weber, and his son-in-law—both remarkable for the enormous red wedge of sturdy neck visible between their close cut hair and the cloth of the coat collar—formed a succession of grotesque frock coats, crumpled in all the folds contracted in the cupboards from which they seldom emerged, and with straight and stiff sleeves in which the elbows seemed to make no impression. Then came the Levindré family, the brothers and sisters of Bélisaire, neighbours, friends, and finally Jack without his mother—Madame de Barancy having consented to honour the wedding repast with her presence, but not to follow the whole course of the proceedings throughout the day.

After the crowd at the Mairie, and the interminable

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waiting not unaccompanied by the pangs of hunger—for noon was long past—the *cortège* set forth to take the train at the station for Vincennes. The meal, a kind of combined dinner and lunch, was to take place at Saint-Mandé, in the Avenue du Bel-Air, at a restaurant of which Bélisaire had the name written on a crumpled bit of paper at the bottom of his pocket. This information was by no means unnecessary, since, in the same circus, at the entrance of the wood, four or five establishments all exactly alike, presented themselves to view, all with the same sign “WEDDINGS AND BANQUETS,” repeated on the kiosks and châteaux temptingly ornamented with creepers. When Bélisaire’s party arrived, the room allotted to them was still occupied, so they set off to make the round of the lake of Vincennes; that Bois de Boulogne of the poor.

Numbers of other wedding parties, some filled to repletion, others still at work on their open-air feasts, dotted the green with patches of white dresses, black coats and uniforms—it is rare if a college boy or a soldier, or some uniform or other does not figure at these *fêtes*. These assemblages were full of fun, singing and laughing, stuffing themselves with much bawling, chasing and dancing of quadrilles and other dances around grinding organs. The men had put on women’s bonnets, the women men’s hats. Behind the hedges others were to be seen playing Blind-man’s-Buff in their shirt sleeves, or else couples indulging in a stolen kiss, or some brides-maid pinning together the torn gathers of the bride’s dress. Oh! with what a light heart do these poor girls drag their white dresses, faintly tinted with the blue of the starch, over the grass plots, fancying themselves, for one day at least, ladies of the highest elegance. It is this above all the people seek in their pleasures; an

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illusion of riches, of passing from its actual social condition to that of the fortunate and envied ones of the world !

The hawker and his party wandered in a melancholy fashion through the dust and noise of this hymeneal festivity, and stuffed themselves with biscuits and sweets while awaiting the longed-for banquet. Certainly the elements of gaiety were not wanting among them, as they would presently prove, but for the moment, hunger paralysed all expansion. At last one of the members of the Bélisaire tribe sent forward as scout, came to announce that all was ready, that they had only to sit down to table, and they speedily turned their footsteps again towards the restaurant.

The feast was spread in one of the great rooms divided by movable partitions, painted in dull colours, and ornamented with gilding and mirrors all precisely alike. Everything could be heard from one room to another: the laughter, the clink of the glasses, the calls to the waiters and the impatient ring of the bells. The hot steaming atmosphere that prevailed, the prim little garden laid out in squares beneath the windows, made the whole thing look like some vast bathing establishment. Here, as at the Mairie, the guests were at first seized with a timid awe at the sight of the handsomely laid table, ornamented at either end with a bouquet of artificial orange flowers, with impossible structures of pastry, green and pink sweets, the whole affair immovable for centuries past, prepared permanently for weddings, and spotted by generations of flies that persisted in alighting thereon notwithstanding the blows from the waiter's napkins. While waiting for Madame de Barancy, who had not yet arrived, each one took his seat. The bridegroom wished to sit by his wife, but the sister from Nantes said this was

no longer done—that it was not proper, and that they must be placed opposite to each other. This was done, but only after a long debate, during which old Bélisaire, turning towards his new daughter-in-law, asked her in a very disagreeable tone :

“ Come now, you ; how should it be done ? How did you sit with Monsieur Weber ? ”

Thus interrogated, the bread-carrier replied very quietly that she had been married in the country, in a farm-house, and that she had even waited at table on the occasion. The old man's ill-natured malice was therefore disappointed, but it was evident the Bélisaire clan was not satisfied and all the splendours of the dinner could not restore their serenity. The marriage of the eldest meant the family milch-cow running dry, the clearest of the family profits taking wings.

To begin with, every one sat in silence ; primarily, because every one was intensely hungry, and secondly because of a certain restraint imposed by the presence of the gentlemen in black who waited upon them, whom Bélisaire vainly tempted to unbend with his kindly smile. They are a singular type, these suburban waiters, withered, faded, impudent, with shaven chins and great whiskers falling on either side, leaving the mouth visible and giving to it an ironical, severe, official impression. One might have supposed them to be destitute *prefects*, reduced to a menial situation. The comic part of it all, was the scornful air with which they regarded all those poor devils of scant means, guests of a hundred-sous-a-head wedding. This prodigious price of a hundred sous (four shillings) repeated amongst the company with admiration,—surrounded this Bélisaire, capable of spending a hundred francs (four pounds) all at one fell swoop upon his wedding breakfast, with a halo of luxury, but filled

the waiters with a profound disdain betrayed by winks among themselves and an impassible gravity towards the guests. One of these gentlemen stood by the side of Bélisaire, oppressing him with the awe of his presence, while another, stationed just opposite behind his wife's chair, stared at him so disagreeably that the worthy hawker, to escape this watchful gaze, had taken the *menu* placed at his left hand, and did nothing but read and re-read it. That *menu* was a startler! Among certain familiar words easy to recognize, such as *ducks, carrots, fillet of beef, haricot beans*—strange epithets magniloquent or fantastic, reared their heads; names of towns, generals, battles—*Marengo, Richelieu, Chateaubriand, Barigoule*,—in face of which Bélisaire like all the rest of the company sat stupified. And to think they were going to eat all this! Can you fancy the faces of the unfortunate people when two plates of soup were offered them: "Bisque or Crécy?" two bottles of Spanish wine: "Sherry or Pascaret?" just as in those drawing-room games where two names of flowers are given you to choose from, beneath which unexpected forfeits lie concealed. How could a decision be taken? Each one hesitated, then chose at haphazard. The choice, after all, made but little difference, the two plates containing the same warm and tasteless fluid, the two bottles one and only one yellow and cloudy liquid, a strange wash that recalled to Jack the *églantine* of the Gymnase Moronval. The guests cast puzzled and scared glances at each other, furtively watching their neighbours to see how they managed, and which of their numerous differently shaped glasses they should tender to the waiter. The "Mate" got out of the difficulty by drinking everything out of one glass, and that the largest. All the same, so many anxieties and embarrassments had thrown a great chill

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upon the opening of the illusory repast. It was the bride who first of all rose above the ridiculous situation.

The excellent woman, by a remarkably just train of reasoning, soon saw the rights of the matter and reassured herself, by addressing her child.

"Don't stint yourself, my darling," said she, "don't stint yourself, eat everything. It costs us dear enough, so we may as well enjoy it."

This speech so full of wisdom had its effect upon the assemblage, and soon a formidable noise of moving jaws and of laughter circulated freely around the table, where the breadbasket was particularly in demand. The tribe of Bélisaires alone were out of tune with the general gaiety. The younger ones whispered and sneered on the sly; the old man talked loudly in a snappish tone, indulging in ironical laughter when he looked at his son, who, nevertheless treated him with great respect, and constantly reminded his wife, across the table, to look after "the father's glass," or "the father's plate." One could not help wondering on seeing all these rapacious and blinking Bélisaires assembled here together, how Madame Weber had managed to effect the escape of her poor hawker from their tyranny. It had needed all the magic of love to accomplish this revolution; but it was accomplished now and the good woman felt herself strong enough to assume this great responsibility and to confront all the antipathies, hatreds, malicious allusions, which at this very hour surrounded her, yet did not prevent her from beaming upon all around her with a broad smile on her face as she filled her boy's plate saying: "Don't stint yourself, my pet!" The feast was beginning to get more animated, when a rustle of silk was heard, and the door opened wide to admit the hurried, smiling and dazzling Ida de Barancy.


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"I am sure I beg your pardon, my good people. But I had a cab that positively crawled; and then it is so far! I really thought I should never get here."

She had put on her best dress, delighted to make a smart toilet, for which occasion had been wanting during the month she had been living with her son. She produced an amazing effect. The way in which she sat down by Bélisaire, in which she put her gloves in her glass, in which she signed to one of the waiters to bring the *menu*, plunged the whole assembly into an ecstasy of awed admiration. They were enchanted to see how she ordered about the imposing and scornful waiters. She had recognized one of them—him who had so terrified Bélisaire—as having seen him in a restaurant on the boulevards where she sometimes supped with d'Argenton after the play.

"So you are here now? Well! What are you going to give me?"

She laughed aloud, raised her arms, bare under the open sleeves, in order to make her hands whiter, shook her bracelets while glancing at herself in the mirror opposite and with the tips of her fingers, tossed a good morning to her son. Then she asked for a stool, for Seltzer water, for ice, as one who knew exactly the resources of the restaurant. While she spoke a silence reigned round the table, as profound as that which had distinguished the beginning of the repast. Without mentioning the young Bélisaires, absorbed in the contemplation of Ida's bracelets, that their gleaming eyes assayed like a touchstone, all were plunged again in the same embarrassment of speech and movement as had been caused at first by the waiters. Jack for his part was not in the mood to lend animation to the festivities. All the marriage ceremonies made him dream of love and of

the future, and he was but little interested in what went on around him.

"Come, come, it's not very lively here!" said Ida de Barancy, suddenly, when she had thoroughly enjoyed her easily won triumph. "Come, my good Bel, a little spirit, for Heaven's sake! But first, wait a minute."

She rose, took her plate in one hand, her glass in the other: "I beg to change places with Madame Bélisaire. I am sure her husband won't object."

This was done with so much grace and condescension, the proposition filled Bélisaire with such absolute delight, the little Weber uttered such yells and howls when his mother lifted him from the chair he occupied, that the atmosphere of embarrassment during which only the noisy rattling of forks had been heard, was dispersed once and for all, and the repast became really a wedding feast. Everyone ate, or rather imagined he ate. The waiters went round and round the table, executing prodigies of prestidigitation, helping twenty persons off one duck, one chicken, so artfully carved that every one had some, and might even have come again for more. Then there were the green peas, *à l'Anglaise*, falling like hail upon the plates; and the haricot beans, also *à l'Anglaise*, prepared on a corner of the table with salt, pepper, a little butter (and what butter!), the whole amalgamated by a waiter who smiled viciously, as he stirred the unwholesome preparation! But the great event was the arrival of the champagne. Excepting Ida de Barancy, who had drunk a good deal of it in the course of her life, all those present knew this magic wine only by name, and the mere sound of the word champagne signified to them wealth, and pleasure in every shape. They talked of it in undertones among themselves, waited for it, watched for it. At last, at dessert, a waiter

appeared carrying a bottle with a silver capsule, which he proceeded to remove with pincers. At the gesture of stopping her ears made by the nervous Ida, who never missed an opportunity for effect, or for pose—nothing, in short, that could call attention to her graces—all the other women made ready for some formidable detonation. There was nothing of the kind. The cork came out quite naturally and normally, without any explosion, like any other wine cork in the world, and immediately the waiter, bearing the bottle on high, rushed round the table at a run, saying very quickly: “Champagne, champagne, champagne.” The glasses were held out to him on his passage, while this time he executed the trick of the inexhaustible bottle. There was froth enough for twenty people, and a sharp flavoured sparkle at the bottom of each glass, tasted by every one with great respect; and we must even believe that after the round was made, some yet remained in the bottle, since Jack, who was placed opposite to the door, saw the waiter thrust it down his own throat as he went away. All the same so great is the magic of the word champagne, there is so much truly French gaiety in the least scrap of its froth, that an astonishing animation sprang up from that moment among the company. Among the Bélisaires, it showed itself in extraordinary rapacity. They swept off everything upon the table, shifting all they could into their pockets—oranges, rancid cakes, sugar plums—saying it was better to carry them off than to leave them for the waiters. All at once, amid laughter and whispering, a plate of deceptive bon-bons was passed to Madame Bélisaire, embellished with the traditional baby in pink and blue sugar which is invariably offered to the bride at *fêtes* of this kind! but there was the little Weber boy with his huge frizzled head to prevent the worthy woman

from being shocked at this coarse and customary joke. She laughed at it more loudly than the others, while Bélisaire blushed and blushed again.

Then the songs began. The Mate was the first to rise ; he commanded silence with a glance, and with his hand upon his heart, began, in a sentimental and husky voice, a popular song of '48—

*" Le t'avail plaît à Dieu,  
Enfants de Dieu, créateur de la terre—  
Accomplissons chacun notre métier." \**

Ah ! this mate was a cunning rogue ! and had rightly divined with what kind of song he could win the hearts of the valiant household of which he had just become a member. But in order not to leave the company under too serious an impression, immediately after "*Labour is pleasing to God*," he began something more cheerful :

*" A Charonne, c'est le moins qu'on entre  
Boire un p'tit coup chez Savard." †*

He knew hundreds like this. What a capital mate for Monsieur and Madame Bélisaire ! What delightful evenings in store for the Rue des Panoyaux. Meanwhile, the waiters had no doubt observed the depredations committed by the hooked fingers of the Bélisaire tribe, for in the twinkling of an eye, the table was stripped of all its adornments, and completely cleared. All was over ! The guests looked at one another in consternation. Above them, around them, the row was tremendous ;

\* "*Labour is pleasing to God :  
Children of God, creator of the world—  
Let each do his best in his calling.*"

† "*The least you can do at Charonne  
Is to take a glass at Savard's !*"

some were dancing, others singing: the boards shook violently in measured time. "Suppose we dance too!" All very well, but music costs dear. Some one proposed they should make use of the music resounding on all sides of them. Unfortunately the strains of quadrilles, polkas, varsovienas, schottisches were mingled with so much impartiality in this tumult of violins and cornets, that it was impossible to distinguish anything.

"Ah, if only we had a piano!" sighed Ida de Barancy, running her fingers on every available piece of furniture, as if she knew how to play. Madame Bélisaire would have been equally well pleased to dance, but she had forbidden her husband any further expenses. The hawker, nevertheless went off with his mate, and, five minutes after, re-appeared with a kind of village fiddler, who established himself on a little improvised platform, a quart of wine between his legs, his violin firmly pressed against his shoulder; and so, hey for the music! till to-morrow morning if you will! This rustic fiddler, who with a strong Berrichon accent cried, "Take your places for the pastourelle!" the precaution taken by the women of wrapping a handkerchief round their waists to preserve their dresses from the hands of their partners; the *bourrée*\* steps that Madame Bélisaire introduced in all the figures of the quadrille, seemed to bring a certain rustic and open-air perfume into this tea-garden saloon, with its decoration of tawdry gilt panels. It was true suburb—that intermediary line where the traditions of the country and the manners of Paris meet and unite. Ida and her Jack alone seemed to have strayed there, fallen from some upper region into the depths of the populace; and

\* A step peculiar to the Auvergne village dances.

yet Ida enjoyed all so much that it was difficult not to believe that she found here, notwithstanding all her pretensions to nobility, a reminder of the life of her youth, a renewal of a time long gone by. She laughed, she romped, organized rounds, country dances, cotillons; and the rustle of her silk dress, the clinking of her bracelets, created a deep impression of admiration and jealousy in the minds of the assistants.

Bélisaire's wedding thus became extremely gay. The bridegroom himself, delighted to make use of his new feet, made an enthusiastic muddle of all the figures of the quadrille. In the adjoining saloons the listeners said: "What fun they are having," and looked through the doors left open at every moment by the waiters who were handing round bowls of negus. Soon, as it generally happens in these *fêtes*, intruders began to mingle with the guests, increasing their number in a remarkable manner. All this mob hopped, bawled, and above all drank prodigiously, and Madame Bélisaire would have been very uneasy if the baker, her employer, had not announced that he would stand all the expenses of the ball. Morning, however, was drawing near. For a long time past little Weber had been snoring, laid on a bench, wrapped up in his mother's square shawl. Jack had made many signs to Ida, which she pretended not to understand, for she was carried away by the pleasure that her happy temper knew how to elicit wherever she found herself. He resembled an old papa trying to get his daughter away from a party:

"Come, it is late."

She passed by, spinning round in no matter whose arms:

"Directly. Wait a little."

But now the spirit of the ball became wilder and less

decorous, so that he felt some embarrassment on her account. The mate began to play the fool, and among the strictly proper *bourrées* of the former Madame Weber launched a few "*cavalier seul*" executed on his hands, with his pipe still in his mouth! Jack succeeded in seizing his mother upon the wing, in wrapping her in her great hooded mantle, and in handing her into the very last cab crawling along the avenue. After them, the newly-married Bélisaires were not long in starting homewards, leaving their jovial guests to themselves. There was no train at this early hour, nor omnibus either. The newly-wed couple decided to return on foot through the Bois de Vincennes, Bélisaire carrying the child on his shoulder, and giving his arm to his wife. The morning freshness seemed pleasant to them after the stifling atmosphere they had left at the tea-garden; the aspect of which was unattractive enough in the early dawn. The little garden, littered with emptied bottles, with great tubs in which glasses had been washed, appeared through a film of mist, scattered with shreds of tulle and muslin, torn from the dresses of the women by their partners' heels. While the cracked fiddles were still to be heard on the ground floor, the sleepy, dazed, but still sardonic waiters were opening the windows of the first floor, shaking the carpets, watering the floors—already beginning to rearrange the scenery for the next representation. Stiff and footsore revellers, with heated faces and drooping eyelids, were inquiring for vehicles or falling asleep on the benches before the door while waiting for the first train. There were wrangles at the counter over the settling of the bills, quarrels, family disputes and battles. Monsieur and Madame Bélisaire were soon far away from these victims of pleasure. Happy, robust, and with heads held high, they had followed with rapid steps a

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little cross-road wet with morning dew, and alive with the chirrupings of birds, and re-entered Paris by the great avenues of Bel-Air, in the shade of the blossoming acacias. It was a long stage, but the road did not seem tedious to them. The child slept all the way, resting his great head in conscious security upon the hawker's breast, and not even waking when he was laid down in his wicker-work crib, on reaching home at about six o'clock in the morning. Madame Bélisaire immediately took off her fine blue dress, her flowery cap, and donned her great bibbed apron. For her, Sunday did not exist. Bread is just as much in demand on that day as on any other. Therefore she was soon at work on her rounds, and while her child and her husband slept at home like tops, the worthy creature uttered her resounding "Here's the bread!" at all her customers' doors, with a kind of courageous satisfaction, as if she were at work already, to pay off the cost of this splendid wedding.

It did not take the new household long to discover the incapacity of their Mate, and what a bad bargain they had made in taking him for a partner. The marriage festivities had already given Bélisaire the opportunity of observing that individual's taste for drink. A week later, he was acquainted with all his other vices, the result of an indelible indolence which was sunk into the man's flesh like a foul stain, and had rusted all his working faculties. By trade, the Mate was a locksmith, but within the memory of his comrades he had never been seen to work, although he never showed himself without his hammer on his shoulder and his leathern apron rolled under his arm. This apron, which he never unrolled, served him as a pillow many times a day, when, on leaving the public-house after too prolonged a visit, he

experienced the need of a siesta on some bench of the outer boulevards, or in some yard of old building materials. As to the hammer, it was an attribute, an emblem, nothing else; he carried it just as the statues representing Agriculture in the public squares carry a cornucopia, without, however, letting anything ever fall from it. Every morning, before going out, he brandished it, saying: "I am going to look for work." But it is to be supposed that his gestures, the way in which he muttered in his wild-looking beard, while he rolled his flaming eyes, frightened away work, for never did the Mate appear to meet with it on his road; he spent all his time prowling about the suburb from one tavern to another — "doing panther," as the Parisian artisans say, no doubt in allusion to that ceaseless movement backwards and forwards that they see in the cages of the wild beasts, during their Sunday walks in the Zoological Gardens.

At first, Bélisaire and his wife were patient. The sententious air of the Mate had some weight with them; and then he sang: "Labour is pleasing to God," so well! But as, after all, he eat with a hearty appetite, the new-married couple, who were toiling from morning till night, while the other one was doing "panther" all the week and never bringing in a cent on pay-day, began to be tired of him. Madame Bélisaire was of opinion that he should simply be dismissed, handed over again to the streets, to the heap of sweepings from which the hawker must have picked him up in his eager desire to find a mate. But Bélisaire, rendered more benevolent than ever by the perfect happiness he enjoyed in his home, and in his new boots, begged his wife to bear with him a little longer. When a Jew bestirs himself to be generous his charity is boundless.

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“Who knows,” said he, “if one could not reform him, change him?”

It was therefore arranged that whenever Ribarot should return home, feeling his way by the walls, and thick in his speech, he should have no supper, which was a great privation to the drunkard, who by a freak of nature was more hungry on these days than on others. It was a perfect comedy to see the efforts he made to keep upright, to greet them without opening his lips. But the bread-carrier was gifted with extraordinary sagacity, and often as she was dealing out the spoonfuls of soup, and the Mate held out his plate, she would break forth :

“Aren’t you ashamed to come to table in the state you are in? For you are tipsy again, I can see that quite well.”

“Do you think so?” Bélisaire would say. “It seems to me——”

“All right, I know what I know. Come off with you to your straw, and look sharp about it.”

The Mate would rise, take up hammer and apron, while stammering some dignified or explanatory words and casting a longing glance towards the smoking soup; and would sneak off and curl himself up like a dog in the nook that Bélisaire had occupied before his marriage. He did not take his liquor unkindly; the bushy beard, like a dirty barricade, hid the weak countenance of a vicious child. When he was gone :

“Come,” the hawker would say, pursing up his great, good-natured mouth, “come let him have a little soup, all the same.”

“Oh ! I know ! If I listened to you !——”

“Just for this once. Come !”

The wife resisted a little longer, with that indignation

that the woman of the people, who works as hard as a man, feels against a man who does nothing ; but she always ended by yielding, and Bélisaire would triumphantly carry away a plateful of soup to the Mate in his dog-kennel. Then he would return to the table quite moved.

“ Well, what did he say to you ? ”

“ Do you know he quite grieved me, he was so much upset about it. He says, that if he drinks it is from grief at not being able to find work, and being such a burden to us.”

“ What prevents him from getting work ? ”

“ He says that no one will have anything to say to him, because he has not decent clothes, and that if he could be tidied up a little——”

“ Thank you, I have had enough of tidying him up. How about the coat for the wedding that you had made for him without telling me, and that he has sold since ? ”

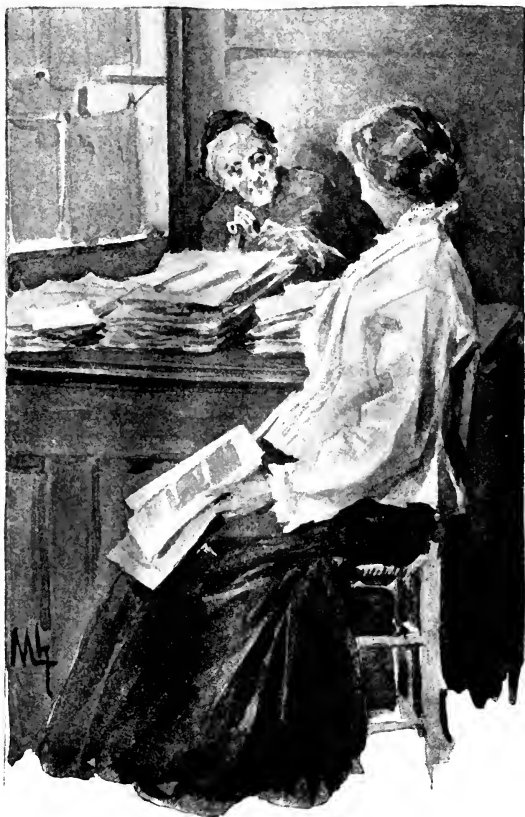
To this there could be no reply. Nevertheless, the worthy couple made yet another effort, and bought Ribarot a working smock. One fine morning he started off with a newly-washed shirt, a cravat made for him by Madame Bélisaire, and did not appear again for a week, at the end of which time he was found asleep in his hole, stripped of the greater part of his garments, though still in possession of his hammer and the imperishable leathern apron, which alone he had saved from the general wreck. After several breakings-out of this kind, they only waited a convenient occasion to get rid of the intruder, who instead of being a help to the household was becoming a very heavy burden. Bélisaire himself was obliged to own it, and often would he complain of Ribarot to his friend Jack. The latter better than any-

one could understand his grievance, for he, too, had saddled himself with a sadly-inconvenient mate, but one of whom he could not complain. He loved her too well for that !



VII.

IDA FEELS DULL.



Ida would go down to Madame Lévêque's circulating library.



MADAME DE BARANCY'S first visit to Etiolles was a source of mingled joy and anxiety for Jack. He was proud at having got back his mother, but he knew her to be such a chatterbox, so rash in words and

deeds! He dreaded Cécile's judgment, the unforeseen light, the rapid and severe divination of a youthful mind, that guesses what it ignores. The first moments of the in-

terview rather reassured him. With the exception of Ida's emphatic tone as she called Cécile "My daughter" and threw her arms round her neck, all went off satisfactorily; but when under the influence of an excellent luncheon, Madame de Barancy lost her serious manner and reverted to the easily aroused mirthfulness of the woman who laughs in order to show her teeth; when she began to pour forth her extravagant stories, Jack felt all his apprehensions return. Her joy and emotion put her in the mood for adventures, and she kept her hearers in a state of perpetual surprise. Some mention was made of Monsieur Rivals' connections who lived in the Pyrenees.

"Ah! the Pyrenees! sighed Ida, Gavarnie, the mountain torrents, the glaciers! I made that journey about fifteen years ago with a friend of my family, the Duc de Cassarès, a Spaniard; the brother of the general. What a mad fellow, when I come to think of it. He nearly made me break my neck twenty times at least. Fancy, we used to drive with postillions and four horses at full gallop the whole time, the carriage crammed with champagne! He was quite a character, that little Duke. I had made his acquaintance at Biarritz in a very funny way!"

Cécile having said she was fond of the sea:

"Ah! my dear child, if you had seen it as I did, off Palma in a storm! I was in the saloon with the captain, a boorish kind of fellow, who wanted to force me to drink rum-punch. I refused. Then the wretch became mad with rage, opened the window in the stern of the ship, took me like this by the nape of the neck, (he was a very powerful man) and held me suspended over the sea, in the rain, spray and lightning—It was awful."

Jack tried in vain to cut short these dangerous stories, but they invariably began again at one end or another,



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like those reptiles whose fragments, when severed, remain full of life, and wriggle about notwithstanding the mutilation. Cécile was respectfully assiduous towards the mother of her friend, but slightly worried nevertheless at Jack's preoccupation that morning. Imagine the poor fellow's feelings, when, at the hour for his lesson, he heard the young girl say to his mother: "Let us go down into the garden?" Nothing could be more natural, but the idea that they would be alone there together filled him with unutterable dread. What might she not now say, Good Heavens! During the doctor's explanations, he watched them walking side by side through the orchard. Cécile with her tall, slim figure, and quiet gestures—like all really elegant women—her pink skirt brushing gently over the borders of flowery thyme; and the majestic Ida, still handsome, but exuberant in dress and attitude. She wore a hat covered with feathers, remains of her former splendour, and with mincing steps she walked along playing at being youthful, then suddenly she would stop short and with her open parasol, make a sweeping gesture. Ida alone was talking, that was manifest, and Cécile, as she listened, from time to time, would raise her lovely face towards the window at which she could see, bending towards each other the curly head of the pupil and the white locks of the teacher. For the first time Jack thought his lesson long; and he was only at peace when set free to pace the forest lanes with his sweetheart lightly leaning on his arm. The touch of Cécile's hand seemed to impart to her lover the same marvellous impulse the sail imparts to the boat, when it sends it bounding through the current and the breeze. Then all the difficulties of life, all the obstacles in the career he was attempting, disappeared; he felt certain of conquering them, assisted by the cheering

influence, which hovered above him in the mysterious regions whence fate lets loose its storms. That day however, his mother's presence disturbed this delicious sensation. Ida understood nothing about love: for her it was either a ridiculously false sentimentality, or a *tête-à-tête* frolic. She had, as she pointed the lovers out to the doctor, little significant laughs, "hum! hum!" or else leant on his arm with long deep-drawn sighs: "Ah doctor! what a thing it is to be young!" But worst of all, was the sudden sensitiveness she betrayed on the score of propriety; calling back the young people, and fancying they were going too far ahead: "Do not go so far, children—let us keep you in sight." And her glances became full of meaning.

Two or three times Jack caught an expression on the doctor's face, which showed she annoyed him. Nevertheless, the forest was so lovely, Cécile so thoroughly affectionate, the words they exchanged mingled so well with the humming of the bees, the murmuring buzz of the gnats in the oak tops, the chirping from the nests and the purling of the streams amid the foliage, that little by little, the poor fellow ended by forgetting his terrible companion. But with Ida, one could not be long at ease, an *éclat* was ever imminent. The party stopped for a moment at the keeper's house. When she recognized her former mistress, Mother Archambauld was full of attentions and made all sorts of compliments, without however, asking a word about Monsieur, understanding, with her sound peasant's common sense, that he was not to be mentioned. The sight of the good creature, so long mixed up in her home life, was disastrous to the former Madame d'Argenton. She would not touch the refreshments Mother Archambauld had hurriedly prepared in the parlour, but suddenly rose, left hastily, and

went off in the direction of Les Aulnettes by herself, with long rapid strides as though someone had called her. She wanted to see "*Parva domus*" once more.

The turret of the house was more than ever wreathed in wild-growing Virginian creepers and ivy, that hemmed it in and clothed it from top to bottom. Hirsch must have been absent, for all the shutters were closed, silence reigned over the garden; the mouldy flight of steps did not show the trace of any footsteps. Ida paused for a moment, listened to all that these mute but eloquent stones said to her; then she gathered a branch of clematis that clustered over the wall in its myriads of little white star-like blossoms, and with closed eyes, seated on the steps of the threshold, lengthily inhaled its fragrance.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack, who had anxiously been looking for her for a few minutes.

She replied, her face bathed in tears:

"Nothing—A little emotion—So much of my life lies buried here."

The fact is that with its silent melancholy, and its Latin inscription over the door, the little house resembled a tomb. She wiped her eyes, but her mirth was ended for the day. In vain did Cécile, who had been told that Madame d'Argenton was separated from her husband, strive to efface this painful impression by her affectionate attentions; in vain did Jack seek to turn her thoughts from the past, and interest her in his plans for the future.

"You see, my child," she said to him as they returned in the evening to the station at Evry, "I shall not accompany you often here. I have suffered too much to-day, the wound is too recent."

Her voice shook as she spoke. Thus, after all that

man had made her suffer, after the humiliations, and insults he had heaped upon her, she loved him still !

Several Sundays passed by without Ida's returning to Etiolles; and henceforth Jack had to divide his holidays ; spend half with Cécile, but give up the best part of their time, their forest rambles, their pleasant chats at dusk, on the rustic orchard bench, and return to Paris to dine with his mother. He came back in the empty, overheated trains, passing from the calm of the woods to the animation of the suburban Sunday life. The crowded omnibuses, the side-pavements invaded by the tables of the little coffee-houses at which whole families, father, mother and children, were seated with beer-glasses and illustrated papers before them ; the crowds that gazed open-mouthed at a big yellow balloon rising from the gas-works, all this throng made such a contrast with what he had left, that he was bewildered and depressed. The more deserted Rue des Panoyaux recalled to him a provincial street, with its games of battledore and shuttlecock in front of the doors, and the concierge seated with a few friends in the courtyard of the silent house enjoying the freshness created by frequent waterings. Generally when he reached home, he would find his mother talking in the passage with the Levindrés. Bélisaire and his wife, who went out regularly every Sunday, from twelve o'clock to midnight, would willingly have carried off Madame de Barancy ; but she was ashamed of being seen with such poor people, and moreover was better suited by the society of this pompous worded and idle pair of artisans. Madame Levindré, a dressmaker by trade, had been waiting for the last two years to begin work till she could purchase a sewing-machine that cost six hundred francs ; (twenty-four pounds) six hundred francs, not a sou less ! As for the

husband, having been formerly a jeweller on his own account, he declared he would not now work for a master. A little help borrowed here and there from the relations of the one or the other, kept alive this pitiable household, a veritable nest of rancour, disaffection and complaints against society. With these outcasts, Ida got on marvellously well, sympathized with their distress, and revelled in the admiration and adulation they lavished upon her, hoping to get from her the six hundred francs for the sewing-machine, or the sum necessary to buy a stock ; for she had told them she was only undergoing a temporary embarrassment, and that she had but to choose it to be again very rich. The dark stuffy passage heard many a confidence and sigh :

“ Ah ! Madame Levindré.”

“ Ah ! Madame de Barancy.”

Monsieur Levindré, who had invented a whole political system, unfolded it in high-sounding phrases ; while from the den where the Mate was sleeping off his wine, arose a sonorous and monotonous snore. However, the Levindrés themselves sometimes spent the Sundays with their relatives and friends, or attended some Free-Masons’ banquet, which saved them a dinner. On those occasions, to avoid the melancholy dulness of her solitude, Ida would go down to Madame Lévêque’s circulating library, where Jack knew beforehand that he would find her.

This little dingy shop, full of mouldy-smelling, green-backed books, was literally obstructed by the pamphlets, illustrated papers a fortnight old, half-penny horrors, or fashion papers, that were spread out in the window ; and received a little light and air only through the open door, against the glass of which dangled all kinds of coloured illustrations.

In this den lived an old, terribly old woman, pretentious and filthy, who spent her time in plaiting coloured ribbon—trimmings such as our grandmothers ornamented their reticules with. It seems that Madame Lévêque had known better days, and that under the first Empire her father had been rather an important personage, some court usher or porter at the Palace.

"I am the god-daughter of the Duc de Dantzick," she would say to Ida emphatically. She was one of those old advocates of bygone days, such as are found in the eccentric quarters of Paris, tossed back by its ever-rising tide. Similar to the dusty stock in her shop, to her calico-covered books, all incomplete or torn, was her conversation—full of romantic and tarnished magnificence. The marvels of that magic reign, of which she had witnessed only the end, had left a bewildering dazzlement in her eyes, and the way she said "*Messieurs les Maréchaux*," summoned up at once a pageantry of plumes, and gold lace, shoulder-knots, and caps edged with white ermine. And her anecdotes about Josephine, the witty sayings of Madame la Maréchale Lefèvre! There was one story that Madame Lévêque told better and oftener than any other, it was the fire at the Austrian Embassy the night of the famous ball given by the Princesse de Schwarzenberg. All her life had remained lighted up by the glare of that famous fire and through its flames she saw the sparkling Marshals, the tall bare-necked ladies with their hair dressed *à la Titus* or Greek fashion, pass by, and the Emperor in his green coat and breeches, carry off in his arms, in the midst of the blazing garden, the fainting form of the Princesse de Schwarzenberg. With her mania for titles, Ida felt in her element in the society of this old fool. And while they sat there, in the gloomy book-stall, ringing out the names of Dukes

and Marquises, like second-hand dealers sorting out ancient pieces of brass-work, or broken jewellery, a workman would come in to buy a ha'penny paper, or some woman of the people, impatient for the following chapter of a thrilling *feuilleton*, would come to see if the next number were out, paying her penny, depriving herself of her snuff if old, or her bunch of radishes for breakfast if young, in her eagerness to devour the adventures of *Le Bossu* or *Monte Cristo*, with the thirst that Parisian folk have for romantic novels. Unfortunately on Sundays, Madame Lévêque was often away, for her grandchildren were tailors, and made the liveries of the Faubourg Saint-Germain servants,—“tailors to the nobility,” as she said,—and they invited her every fortnight to dinner. To while away the Sunday, Madame de Barancy had then only the old literary stock-in-trade of Madame Lévêque, a cargo of odd volumes, faded and soiled by all the fingers of the suburb, and retaining between their dilapidated leaves crumbs of bread or patches of grease that showed they had been perused at meal-time. They spoke, these books, of idle girls, lazy workmen, or even literary affectations, for many had pencil-notes or absurd remarks scribbled on the margin.

She would remain dejected and lonely in front of the window, reading novels till she felt dizzy. She read to avoid thoughts and regrets. Out of place, in this workman's house, the busy windows she saw over the way were not for her, as for her son, an incentive to courage, or work of any kind; they brought but a greater feeling of lassitude and bitter aversion. The melancholy woman who was always at work by her window, the poor old creature who said “People who are in the country in such weather are very happy,” only aggravated her personal

ennui by their mute or uttered plaint. The pure sky, the summer heat towering over all this misery, made it appear darker; just as the Sunday's idleness, only broken by the church bells and the whiz of the swallows, made silence and stillness more oppressive. She recalled former days; delightful walks and drives, amusing picnics rose up before her, gilded by regret as by a setting sun. But the last years, passed at Etioilles, were those that remained most painful in her memory. Oh! that happy life, those joyous dinners, enlivened by the delighted exclamations of the ever-renewed guests, the long evenings on the Italian terrace, when HE, standing in the moonlight by the side of a pillar, with uplifted head, and arm outstretched, recited his poem:

*Moi, je crois à l'Amour comme je crois en Dieu.*

Where was he? What was he doing? How was it he had never written during the three months that he had been without news of her? Then the book fell from her hands, and she remained pensive, lost in thought till the return of her son, whom she tried to greet with a smile. But he at once guessed her moral condition by the disordered room, the untidiness of this formerly coquettish woman, who now dragged herself about the attic room in a faded dressing-gown and slipshod shoes. Nothing would be ready for dinner:

"You see! I have done nothing. It is so hot, I am quite exhausted. And then I feel so out of spirits."

"Why are you so depressed? Are you not comfortable with me? You feel dull, do you not?"

"No, certainly not, I am not dull. How could I feel bored with you, my Jack!"

And she would embrace him passionately, strive to



cling to him to save herself from the abyss in which she felt herself disappearing.

"Let us go out for dinner," Jack would say, "that will amuse you."

But Ida missed the supreme amusement of decking herself out, of drawing from the press where they were hanging, one of her former pretty costumes, too coquettish, too eccentric for her present position, their elegance requiring a carriage, or at least another part of the town. She attired herself as quietly as possible for these walks through the poverty-haunted streets. Nevertheless, there would always be something glaring, either in the cut of her bodice, or the little curls on her forehead, or the wide folds of her skirts; and Jack purposely assumed a humdrum, matter of fact air, to shield the disreputable appearance of his mother by the seriousness of his own demeanour. They went off through the crowds of little *bourgeois*, and Sunday-dressed workmen who walked slowly along through the streets and boulevards, of which each sign-board was familiar to them; a mixture of honest faces and ridiculous figures, coats high in the neck, shawls hanging down the back, clothes out of date and fashion, exhibited only on Sundays, the day that is consecrated to amusement and rest, that fills the city with the tramping and rumour of an ever-moving throng dispersing as if after a display of fire-works. There is in truth somewhat of this lassitude in the end of a Sunday already shadowed by the preoccupations of the morrow. Jack and his mother followed the living tide, and stopped at some little eating-house in Bagnolet or Romainville, where they dined. They tried to talk, to exchange ideas; but this was the great difficulty of their common existence. During all the long years of their separation, their lives had been so different! While Ida's refinement

was shocked by the coarse, wine-stained tablecloth of the tavern, while she wiped her glass, her spoon and fork, with disgust, Jack, accustomed as he was to all the sickening details of poverty, hardly noticed the slovenliness of the table. On the other hand, his elevated mind, his intellect developing day by day, was astonished at the vulgarity of his mother, who, though always ignorant, was formerly full of a native spontaneity, which her long acquaintance with the 'Failures' had warped. She had set sentences, turns of phrases borrowed from d'Argenton, and an abrupt and peremptory tone in their discussions: "I, I." She always began thus, and ended by some contemptuous gesture that clearly meant: "I am really too kind to discuss with you, a wretched working man." Thanks to the miraculous power of assimilation which in a few years makes husband and wife resemble each other, Jack was distressed to find on the lovely countenance of his mother, the expression of the "Enemy," even the sneering smile, terror of his persecuted childhood. Never had sculptor, working the soft clay, better fashioned a figure than this false poet, bent on domination, had fashioned this poor deluded fool.

After dinner, one of their favourite walks, on the long summer evenings, was the square of the Buttes-Chaumont that had just been laid out, an immense melancholy square, improvised on the ancient heights of Montfaucon, decorated with grottos, cascades, colonnades, bridges, precipices, and pine woods all along the slopes of the hillside. This garden had an artificial and romantic aspect that filled Ida de Barancy with the illusion of a grand park. She delighted to trail her dress over the sanded pathways, admired the clumps of exotic shrubs, the ruins on which she would have liked to scrawl her name. Then, when they had strolled all over it, they went

up and sat on a bench that overlooked the admirable view visible from these heights. A bluish-tinted Paris, bathed in a floating and distant dust, lay spread out at their feet : a gigantic basin, drowned in an ocean of hot mist and confused murmurs. The hills that surround the suburbs seemed to form in this haze an immense circle ; Montmartre on one side and Père-Lachaise on the other uniting with the old Montfaucon.

Near at hand, they had the spectacle of popular rejoicings. In the winding avenues, between the trimmed lime-trees, the little shopkeepers wandered round the bands, while up above, on what was left of the ancient heights, on the well-trodden grass, and the ochre-coloured earth, workmen's families, scattered like a great flock on a mountain's side, ran about, sprawled, made slides, flew big kites, with many a scream and cry thrown out in the resonant air, far above the heads of the pedestrians. Strangely enough, this magnificent square laid out in the working district, a flattery of the Empire addressed to the inhabitants of La Villette and Belleville, seemed to them too neat, too well raked ; and they forsook it for the old hillsides, more varied and picturesque. Ida watched these games with a certain disdain ; here also, her whole attitude, the droop of her head on her open palm, the sketches with her parasol on the sand, all said : "How bored I am." Jack felt himself very inadequate to cope with this persistent melancholy ; he would have liked to have found some respectable family, not too vulgar, in which his mother would have met women to whom she might confide the puerility of her mind. Once he fancied he had found what he sought for. It chanced one Sunday in this very garden of the Buttes-Chaumont, that an old fellow of bent and rustic appearance, dressed in a brown jacket, was walking in front of them, escorted by two little

children towards whom he leant with the interested and unalterably patient manner that belongs only to a grandfather.

"That seems a familiar figure," said Jack to his companion. "Why, yes, I am not mistaken. It is Monsieur Roudic."

It was indeed father Roudic, but so bent, so aged, that the former apprentice at Indret had recognized him only by the little girl walking beside him, square, blowzy, hewn out as it were, a diminutive Zénaïde; and the little boy, who only required the custom-house cap to be the perfect image of Monsieur Mangin.

"Ah! the little chap," said the worthy fellow, when Jack accosted him, and a sad smile crossed his face, lighted it up and displayed its wrinkles. Then Jack noticed that he wore a wide crape on his hat, and for fear of arousing a recent sorrow, he dared not inquire after anyone. When at the turn of an alley, Zénaïde made her appearance, more massive than ever, now that she had exchanged her wide-pleated skirt for a real gown, and her Guérande coif for a Parisian bonnet: a regular bundle, but so good natured. She was arm in arm with Monsieur Mangin, the former brigadier, now promoted to a post at the Paris custom-house, and dressed in a fine cloth suit with gold braid on the sleeves. How proud Zénaïde was of the fine officer, how fond she seemed of her dear Mangin, notwithstanding her bullying manner and her contradicting him at every moment! It must be supposed that Mangin liked to be treated thus, for he had a happy, open countenance, and but to see the way he looked at his wife, it was easy to guess that if all had to be done over again, now he knew her well, he would have taken her without a dower.

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Jack introduced his mother to these worthy folk then as they walked along in two groups :

"What has happened?" he asked Zénaïde in a low tone. "Is Madame Clarisse——?"

"Yes, she died, two years ago, in a dreadful manner, drowned in the Loire, by accident."

Zénaïde added, lowering her voice :

"We say 'by accident' on account of father ; but you who knew her, Jack, will understand very well, that it was not by accident she died, and that she killed herself,—too miserable at the loss of her Nantais. Ah! really there are men—I can't imagine what love-charm they drug one with ! "

She little guessed, the kind soul, how these words cut Jack to the quick, as he looked sadly at his mother.

"Poor father Roudic," continued Zénaïde, "we thought he would die of it, too. And yet, he has never suspected the truth. For then——! When Monsieur Mangin was promoted to Paris, we brought him with us, and we live all together Rue des Lilas, at Charonne, in a little street full of gardens, quite near the custom-house barracks. You will come and see him, won't you, Jack? You know he was always fond of his little chap. Perhaps you may be able to get him to talk. He hardly ever says a word to us. The children, however, amuse and interest him. Let us rejoin him. He has already looked two or three times our way. He suspects we are talking about him, and he does not like that."

Ida, who was in the full swing of conversation with Monsieur Mangin, stopped short on seeing Jack near her. A word from father Roudic at once acquainted him with the subject.

"Ah yes! by Jove! He was a fine talker and fond of buckwheat cake."

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He understood that d'Argenton was the subject of the conversation. They had asked Ida news of her husband ; and, happy to talk about him, she had expatiated at length on the interesting topic. The poet's talent, his artistic struggles, the high position he occupied in literature, the plots of the dramas or novels he turned over in his brain, she had related all, analyzed all, while the others, without understanding one word, politely listened to her. They separated, promising each other to meet again. Jack was delighted to have again come across these worthy folk, far more agreeable for his mother to associate with than the Lévêques and Levindrés, and in a better social position than the Bélisaires. He accordingly often took Ida there to see them, and recognized the shells, sponges and sea-urchins of Indret on the mantle-piece of this small suburban dwelling ; Zénaïde's religious pictures, and the great press with iron fastenings, all the Breton household gods, expatriated to the Paris fortifications, with the illusion that it was still the country. He felt happy in this atmosphere of provincial cleanliness and honesty. However, he soon perceived that his mother was bored by the serious, hard-working Zénaïde ; and that here, as elsewhere, she was a prey to the same melancholy, the same disgust which she expressed in these words :

"It smells of the workman."

The house in the Rue des Panoyaux, the passage, the room she inhabited with her son, the bread she ate, all seemed to her impregnated with the odour and taste peculiar to the vitiated atmosphere of poor districts, of agglomerations of workmen, of factory smoke, of the sweat of labour that pervades certain quarters of a great city. It smells of the workman ! If she opened her window, she recognized the same smell in the courtyard ; if she went out, the street emitted it in unwholesome whiffs,

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and the people she saw, her Jack even, when he returned from the workshop with his oil-stained blouse, exhaled the same odour of poverty, which clung also to her, and imbued her with the profound and sickening melancholy, that leads to suicide.







VIII.

WHICH OF THE TWO ?



It was Jack who stood before him.



ONE evening Jack found his mother in an extraordinary state of excitement, her eyes sparkling, her colour heightened, free at last from the fixed dull appearance that was beginning to worry him.

"D'Argenton has written to me," she said at once to him.

"Yes, my dear, the fellow has dared to write. After having left me four months without a line or a word, he

has at length lost patience, seeing I did not give him sign of life. He writes to tell me that he has returned to Paris after a little journey, and that, if I should require him, he is quite at my disposal."

"You do not require him, I suppose?" he asked, anxiously watching his mother.

"I! want him? You see how well I get on without him. It is he, on the contrary, who must find himself very lonely without me. A man who can do nothing with his own hands, nothing but hold a pen. Ah! he is a true artist indeed!"

"Are you going to answer him?"

"Answer? An insolent fellow who dared to raise his hand to me! Ah! you little know me. I have, thank God, more pride than that. I did not even finish reading his letter. I threw it away, I know not where, torn to atoms. No indeed! It is not by a woman brought up as I have been in a château, in the midst of affluence, that such violence can be tolerated. All the same, I am curious to know how his establishment is kept, now I am no longer there to keep it in order. It must be in a famous mess. Unless. But no! that is impossible. You don't find every day so great a fool as I. However, it is very certain he was feeling bored, as he has been obliged to go and spend two months at—at—what does he call the place?"

She drew unconcernedly from her pocket the letter she said was lost and torn up, and sought for the name she wanted:

"Ah! yes. It was to Royat he went. What folly! the very worst thing for him, those mineral waters. After all he may suit himself, it is no longer my business."

Jack blushed for her lie, but made no observation. All

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that evening he felt in the atmosphere round the table the uneasy activity of a woman striving to divert her thoughts from one subject, by constant movement. She had recovered the courageous spirits of the first days, tidied, cleaned the room, and while she bustled and moved about, muttered words full of reproachful intonation, and shook her head. Then she came and leant over Jack's chair, kissed him and said coaxingly :

"How brave you are, my darling ! How well you are studying !"

He was, on the contrary, studying very badly, pre-occupied as he was by all that was running through his mother's mind.

"Is it me she is kissing?" he said to himself; and his suspicions were confirmed by a small detail, which showed how completely the past had triumphantly regained possession of that poor womanly heart. She kept on humming d'Argenton's favourite ballad, a certain '*valse des feuilles*' the poet was fond of strumming on the piano, in the twilight, before the lights were brought in :

*"Valsez, valsez, comme des folles,
Pauvres feuilles, valsez, valsez !"* *

Sentimental and slow, she indefinitely drawled out the final notes of the ballad, its rhythm haunting and pursuing her; she dropped it, then took it up again in bits, as if it marked the intervals in her thoughts. Tune and words both reminded Jack of the sad and shameful past. Ah ! if he had dared, what hard truths he would have told that foolish creature; how willingly he would have indignantly thrown in the gutter all those faded bouquets, all those

* "Waltz, waltz away madly,
Poor leaves, waltz, waltz !"

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dry and dead leaves, mad enough to waltz still in the poor empty brain and fill it with their whirlwind. But she was his mother. He loved her, he wanted by dint of respect to teach her to respect herself; and so he said nothing. Only this first warning of danger had launched him into all the jealous throes of those about to be betrayed. He got to watch her look at his departure, and her smile of greeting on his return. He dreaded the fever and reverie that solitude brings to inactive women. And he had no power to have her watched. She was his mother. He could not confide to anyone the distrust she inspired him with. However, Ida had, since d'Argenton's letter, set herself again more valiantly to her household duties: she tidied the room, prepared her son's dinner, and even drew out again the famous account-book full of blanks and white pages. Jack was still mistrustful. He knew the stories of those deceived husbands whose vigilance is lulled by little delicate attentions, and who can recognize the date of their misfortune by the manifestations of an unspoken remorse. Once, on his return from the workshop, he fancied he saw Hirsch and Labassindre, arm in arm, turn the corner of the Rue des Panoyaux. What could they be doing in that remote quarter of the town, so far from the Review and the Quai des Augustins?

"Nobody has called?" he inquired of the concierge, and he felt from the way in which he was answered that he was being deceived, that there was already a plot organized against him. The following Sunday, on returning from Etiolles, he found his mother so completely absorbed in reading that she had not heard him come up. He would not have paid much attention to this, being accustomed to her mania for novels; but Ida too hurriedly concealed the pamphlet she had spread out on her knees.

“How you startled me!” she said at the same moment, purposely exaggerating her emotion to divert Jack’s attention.

“What were you reading?”

“Oh! nothing, some nonsense. How are our friends, the doctor, and Cécile? I hope you kissed the dear child well for me?”

However, while she spoke, a deep blush spread over her brow under her fine transparent skin, for it was one of the peculiarities of her childlike nature, to be as awkward in carrying off a lie, as she was quick to utter it. Embarrassed by his fixed look at her, she rose and said irritably:

“You want to know what I am reading? Well, look!”

He recognized the shiny cover of the Review that he had seen for the first time in the stoke-hole on board the *Cydnus*; now the Review was thinner, reduced to half its former size, and printed on poor paper that gave it the aspect peculiar to Reviews that do not sell. Withal, the same ridiculous pomposity, the same high-sounding and empty titles, delirious social essays, scientific rubbish, and doggrel verses. Jack would not even have opened the grotesque miscellany, if the following title, at the head of the list, had not attracted his attention:

“LES RUPTURES.”\*

Lyric Poem.

By the Vte. AMAURY D’ARGENTON.

\* “Broken Vows.”

It began thus :

*Quoi ! sans un mot d'adieu ! Quoi ! sans tourner la tête !  
Quoi ! pas même un regard au seuil abandonné !  
Quoi ! . . . \**

And two hundred long, closely written lines followed in the same strain, blackened the pages like dull prose, and this was but the prelude. In order that there might be no mistake, Charlotte's name, quoted at every fourth or fifth line, sufficiently edified the reader. Jack threw down the pamphlet and shrugged his shoulders.

"The villain has dared to send you that?"

"Yes, a copy was left downstairs, two or three days ago," she said timidly. "I do not know by whom."

There was a moment's silence. Ida was dying to pick up the pamphlet, but did not dare. At last she bent down in a careless manner. Jack saw her movement.

"You are not going to keep that here, I suppose! Those verses are ridiculous!"

She drew herself up.

"Indeed, I do not think so!"

"Nonsense! In spite of all his efforts to appear moved and croaking *Coua ! Coua !* like a stork, he does not affect us in the least."

"Do not let us be unjust, Jack" (her voice trembled). "God knows I understand Monsieur d'Argenton and his faulty nature better than anyone, for I have suffered from it. The man I do not defend. But the poet is a different thing. It is admitted on all sides, that Monsieur d'Argenton's poetry has a thrill of emotion

\* What ! without one word of farewell ! What ! without one backward look ?

What ! not even a parting glance for the forsaken home ?

What ! . . .



hitherto unknown in France. A thrill of emotion, my dear! Musset had it, but devoid of ideality and nobility. From that point of view the *Credo of Love* is incomparable. However, I think that the beginning of *Broken Vows* is even more touching. That young woman going off in the morning, through the mist, in her ball dress, without one word of farewell, without once looking back."

Jack could not refrain from an indignant cry :

"But it is you, that woman! And you know how you left, under what painful circumstances!"

She replied quivering all over :

"My dear boy, it is useless for you to try and humiliate me, and renew the insult by reminding me of it; this is a question of art, and I fancy I know rather more on this subject than you. Had Monsieur d'Argenton outraged my feelings a hundred times more than he has, that would not prevent my acknowledging him to be one of the most eminent literary men of the day. More than one of those who now affect to despise him, will be proud hereafter to say : "I knew him; I have dined at his table."

Thereupon, she majestically sailed out of the room, to rejoin Madame Levindré, her eternal confidante, and Jack, who had settled down to work,—the work which, bringing him nearer to Cécile, was his only resource in trouble,—soon heard reading going on at the neighbour's, interrupted by enthusiastic exclamations and tears betrayed by the noisy use of pocket-handkerchiefs.

"I must look out, the Enemy is drawing near!" thought the poor fellow. He was not mistaken.

Amaury d'Argenton was as wretched, far from his Charlotte, as she was dull at being no longer with him. Victim and executioner, indispensable to each other, they felt deeply, each one on his side, the void of unsatisfied

existence. From the very day of their separation, the poet had assumed the attitude of a wounded heart and had thrown a dramatic and Byronic expression into his big sallow countenance. He was to be met with in all the night restaurants, at suppers, in the taverns, surrounded by a court of sycophants and toadies to whom he held forth about Her, nothing but Her. He wanted the men and women who saw him to say :

“It is d’Argenton, the great poet. His mistress has abandoned him. He is striving to drown his grief.”

He did in fact strive to forget, supped late, spent the nights out; but he was soon worn out by this unsettled and extravagant mode of living. It is, of course, a magnificent thing to thump upon the table of a night restaurant, and call out: “Waiter, an *absinthe* undiluted!” to make the provincials around say: “He is killing himself. It is for a woman.” However, when one’s health cannot stand it, and when after having called loudly for “an undiluted *absinthe*” one is obliged to add in a whisper to the waiter: “With a great deal of syrup of gum!” this attitude is rather too heroic. After a few days of this existence, d’Argenton’s digestion completely broke down, his “nervous attacks” reappeared more frequently than before, and Charlotte’s absence was felt in all its desolation. What other woman would bear the perpetual complaining, watch the time for administering powders and draughts, and bring them with the solemn piety of a Monsieur Fagon dosing Louis XIV.? All the childish fancies of an invalid returned to him. He became afraid of being alone, and always kept someone, Hirsch or another, to sleep on the divan. The evenings seemed lugubrious, surrounded as he was by the dust and disorder that every woman, even that madcap Ida, knows how to avoid around her. The fire did not warm, the

lamp did not burn, draughts of air rushed from under the doors; and, struck in his egotism, in what was his most tender point, d'Argenton sincerely regretted his companion. He became really unhappy by dint of striving to appear so. Then to divert his thoughts, he tried travelling, but that did not seem to succeed either, at least judging by the mournful tone of his correspondence.

"Poor d'Argenton has written me a most heartrending letter," the "Failures" would say to one another when they met, in an afflicted but at the same time satisfied tone. He wrote to them all, these "heartrending" letters. They took the place of the "cutting words." From afar as when at home, one idea pursued him: "That woman can do without me—she is happy without me—and through her son. Her son is everything to her." This thought exasperated him.

"Write a poem about it," said Moronval, seeing him as wretched on his return as before. "It will relieve you."

He immediately set to work, and with his system of verses written straight off without correction, he had soon composed the prologue of "*Broken Vows*." Unfortunately the poetical composition, instead of calming him, excited him the more. As he had to work himself up, he imagined an ideal Charlotte, prettier, more seraphic than the real one, uplifted on high by his far-fetched inspiration. Henceforth, their separation became intolerable to him.

Directly the prologue of the poem was printed in the Review, Hirsch and Labassindre were sent off to take a copy to the Rue des Panoyaux. This bait thrown out, d'Argenton feeling that decidedly he could not live without Lolotte, determined to strike a decisive blow. He had himself curled, pomatumed, his moustaches waxed, took a cab which was to wait for him at the door, and

presented himself at the Rue des Panoyaux at two o'clock in the afternoon—the hour at which the women were alone, and all the neighbouring factories poured forth their whirlwind of thick black smoke. Moronval, who accompanied him, got out to speak to the *concierge*, and returned saying :

“ You can go up. The sixth floor, at the end of the passage. She is at home.”

D'Argenton went up. He was paler than usual and his heart beat rapidly. Oh mystery of nature ! that such beings should have a heart, and that such a heart could throb ! It was indeed less love than the circumstances that moved him ; the romantic side of the expedition, the cab at the corner of the street as for an elopement, and above all his gratified hatred—the thought of Jack's disappointment when he would return from his work and find the bird flown. This was the plan he had made : appear before her unexpectedly, fall down at her feet, and take advantage of the agitation and bewilderment of her surprise to regain his sway over her. He would entreat her : “ Come, come with me.” He would put her in the carriage and carry her off ! She must have changed very much in these three months to resist such a temptation. This was why he had not warned her, why he walked up softly through the passage so redundant with poverty, with its cracked walls, and the numerous keys on the doors that seemed to say : “ There is nothing worth stealing here, any one may come in.”

He entered abruptly, without knocking, with only a mysteriously modulated : “ It is I.”

Cruel blow ! bitter disappointment eternally dogging the majestic tread of this man ! Instead of Charlotte, it was Jack who stood before him—Jack whom a *fête* of his master's had set free for the day, and who was busily

occupied at his books ; while Ida, lying on her bed in the recess, was as usual shortening the *ennui* of her idle life, by a prolonged siesta.

Brought face to face, the two men looked at each other dumbfounded. This time the poet was at a disadvantage. In the first place, he was not in his own house, and then, how could he possibly treat as an inferior this proud, intelligent and fine-looking fellow, in whose countenance something of the mother's beauty was visible to intensify the disappointment of the lover !

"What do you want here ?" asked Jack as he stood in the doorway to prevent his entry.

The poet reddened, turned pale and stammered out :

"I thought—I had been told your mother was here."

'Yes she is here ; but I am with her, and you shall not see her."

All this was said rapidly, in a low tone, in the same breath of hatred. Then Jack, advancing towards his mother's lover with a violence that could be divined rather than seen, forced him to step back, and they found themselves in the passage. Stunned and abashed, d'Argenton tried to regain his assurance by an attitude, and assuming an air of relenting majesty :

"Jack," said he, "we have been living under a mistake. Now that you are a man, and have attained a serious knowledge of life, it is impossible that our misunderstanding should continue. I hold out my hand to you, dear child, a loyal hand which has never insincerely grasped another."

Jack shrugged his shoulders :

"Why this farce between us, Monsieur ? You hate me, I execrate you."

"And since when are we such enemies, Jack ?"

"I fancy it is since we first met, Monsieur. As far

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back as I remember, I felt hatred in my heart towards you. And in truth, what else can we be towards each other but enemies? What other name can I give you? What are you to me? Ought I even to know you? And if perchance I have thought of you without anger, do you think I can ever have thought of you without shame?"

"That is true, Jack; I admit that mutually our position is a false one, a very false one. But you cannot make me responsible for a chance, a fatality. After all, my dear friend, life is not a romance. We must not expect—"

But Jack cut him short in the middle of the maundering remarks, for which he was never at a loss.

"You are right, Monsieur. Life is not a romance; it is, on the contrary, a serious and positive thing. The proof is that my very moments are counted, and that it is impossible for me to waste my time in idle discussions. During ten years, my mother was your servant, your chattel. What I suffered during those ten years, my childlike pride never told you; but enough of that. My mother is mine now. I have recovered her, and shall use every means to keep her. Never shall I give her up to you. Why should I? What do you want with her? Her hair is grey, her face is wrinkled by the tears you have made her shed. She is no longer the pretty woman who could flatter your vanity. She is a mother—my mother; leave her to me."

They stood face to face on the sordid and miserable landing, amid the squalling of children mingled with the echo of brawls, so frequent in this great industrial hive. The setting was fitted to the humiliating and cruel scene which, at every word, stirred up so much shame and rancour.

"You are strangely mistaken as to the meaning of my

proceedings," said the poet, who, in spite of his assurance, had turned pale. "I know that Charlotte has much dignity, and that her resources are limited. As an old friend, I had come to see if you were in want of anything—if I could not be of use."

"We are in need of no one. My work amply suffices to maintain us both."

"You have become very proud, my dear Jack. In the old days, it was not so."

"That is true, Monsieur. And that is why your presence, which I then endured, has now become too much for me; now let me tell you, that I will not submit to it any longer."

Jack's attitude was so determined, so aggressive, his glance said so much more than his words, that the poet dared not reply; he gravely turned away and went down the six pairs of stairs, where his careful attire and curled locks made a singular impression, giving a good idea of those social errors which, from one end to the other of this strange Paris, connect so many contrasts. When Jack had seen him disappear, he went back into his room. There he found Ida, who, pale and dishevelled, her eyes swollen with sleep and tears, was standing waiting for him behind the door.

"I was there," she said in a low voice. "I heard all—even that I was old and wrinkled."

He went up to her, took her hands, and looking straight into her eyes, he said:

"He has not gone far. Shall I call him back?"

She drew away her hands and without hesitation threw them round his neck, in one of those impulses that saved her from being utterly vile.

"No, my Jack! you are right. I am your mother—only your mother—and I will never be anything else."

A few days after this scene, Jack wrote the following letter to Monsieur Rivals :

“My friend, my father, all is finished, she has left me, and has gone back to him. The circumstances were so cruel, so unexpected, that the blow has been all the greater. Alas! she is my mother, and it would be more worthy to keep silent, not to blame her. But I cannot. I knew in my childhood a poor little nigger who used to say: ‘If poor man had no sigh, poor man soon choke.’ Never did I understand these words as I do to-day. I feel that if I did not heave this great sigh and write this letter, the weight I have on my heart would smother me to death. I had not even the courage to wait until Sunday. It was too far off; and I could never have spoken before Cécile. I have told you, have I not, of the interview I had with that man? Ever since that day, I found my poor mother so forlorn, what she had undertaken seemed to me so far beyond her strength, that I had decided to change the scene to divert her mind and take her out of her grief. I saw that the struggle was engaged, and that if I wished to carry the day, and keep my mother with me, I must use every means and every possible stratagem. She disliked both our house and our street. I must find a gayer, more open quarter, which should prevent her from regretting the Quai des Augustins. I therefore hired at Charonne, Rue des Lilas, at the end of a market gardener’s establishment, three small rooms, newly done up with fresh papers, and I furnished it nicely, more carefully and completely than my former room. All my savings (forgive these details, I have sworn to tell you everything), all I had saved during the last six months for my fees and examinations, was spent in this way, and I knew you would approve. Bélisaire and his wife helped me in my preparations, as well as kind Zénaïde, who lives


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in the same street with her father, and whose society I had counted upon to enliven my poor mother. All had been done secretly to prepare a true lover's surprise; for in the new struggle I had entered upon, I had to fight my enemy, my rival, upon his own ground. I had fondly hoped she would be comfortable here. This bit of suburb, as quiet as a village street, with trees overtopping the walls, and the crowing of cocks piercing the roughly joined planks of the poultry yards, would, I thought, delight her and give her a faint illusion of the country life she regretted so much.

"Yesterday evening, the house was at last ready to receive her. Bélisaire was to tell her that she must meet me at the Roudics, and he was to accompany her at dinner time. I was there long before them, as happy as a child, proudly pacing up and down in our little lodging, so bright and clean with its muslin curtains at every window, and branches of roses on the mantel-piece. I had lit a fire, for the night air was chilly, and it gave the place an air of comfort and homeliness that delighted me. However—you will hardly believe it!—in the very midst of my joy, a cruel and terrible presentiment pierced my heart. It was as rapid and sharp as an electric spark: 'She will not come!' In vain did I call myself mad, did I prepare her chair, her place at table; in vain did I listen for her step in the silent street, and walk through the rooms where all awaited her. I knew she would not come. In all the disappointments of my life, I have had sad forebodings. It would seem as though fate were taken with a sort of pity, when on the point of striking, and warned me, to make the blow less painful. She did not come. Bélisaire came alone, very late, with a note she had given him for me. It was short, merely a few lines hastily scribbled, informing me that Monsieur d'Argenton

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was very ill, and that she considered it her duty to attend his bedside. As soon as he was better, she would return. Ill! I had not foreseen that. Otherwise, I too might have complained and kept her by my bed-side, as he had summoned her to his. Oh! he knew her well, the villain! How he had studied the weak, kindly heart, eager to devote itself and help others! You attended him in those peculiar nervous attacks that he complained of at Etiolles, and which were so quickly dispelled, at table, by a good dinner. It is this same illness that has returned. But my mother, happy no doubt to seize this opportunity of regaining favour, has allowed herself to be taken in by the fiction. And to think that if I fell ill, really ill, she would probably not believe me! However, to return to my sad story—can you fancy me all alone in my little pavilion, in the midst of my preparations of welcome; after so many errands, and efforts, and so much money uselessly spent? Ah, cruel, cruel woman! I could not remain there. I returned to my old room. The little house would have been too sad, sad like a house of mourning; for it seemed to me that my mother had already lived there. I quitted it, leaving the fire to smoulder on the hearth, and my bunches of roses to scatter their leaves softly on the marble. The house is taken for two years, and I shall keep it to the end of the lease, with the same superstitious feeling that makes one keep the cage of a favourite bird that has flown—open and ready to welcome the return of the wanderer. If my mother comes back, we will go there together; but if she does not return, I shall never live there. My loneliness would partake of the sadness of death. And now that I have told you all, need I add that this letter is addressed to you, and you only, and that Cécile is not to see it. I should be too much ashamed. It seems to me

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that in her eyes, some of this infamy would be reflected on me, on the purity of my love. Perhaps she would no longer love me. Ah! my dear friend, what would become of me if such a calamity befell me? I have no one now but her. Her tenderness replaces everything for me; and in my deep despair, when I found myself face to face with the irony of that empty house, I had but one thought, one cry: 'Cécile!' If she too were to abandon me. Alas! this is the terrible consequence of the treachery of our loved ones, it fills our hearts with the apprehension of other treacheries! But what am I thinking of? I have her word, her promise; and Cécile has never been false!"





IX.

CÉCILE CHANGES HER MIND.



Jack sat down on a bench that he might not fall



For a long while he thought his mother would return. In the morning or in the evening, in his silent hours of work, how often he fancied he heard the rustle of her dress in the passage, her light step near the door. When he went to see the Roudics, he always looked at the pavilion Rue des Lilas, hoping that he might find it open, and his Ida settled in the

home he had provided for her, and of which he had sent her the address: "The little house awaits you. It is all ready for you. Whenever you choose, you have but to come." He did not even get an answer. The desertion was complete, definitive, more ruthless than ever.

Jack was thoroughly wretched. When a mother pains us, it wounds like an injustice or cruelty of God—like an unnatural grief. Cécile, however, was a magician. She knew the balms, the simple plants, the soothing remedies that bear the names of flowers, and shed a perfume over the healing process. She knew the enchanting words that appease, the firm glance that restores, and her delicate and ingenious tenderness defied all the relentlessness of fate. Work, too, unremitting work was a powerful aid, acting like a shield, which though heavy and cumbersome, is nevertheless an effectual protection against sorrow.

While his mother had been there, she had often unawares hindered his work, with her giddy bird-like nature, her flighty ways, and her impetuous will that made her suddenly get ready to go out, and as suddenly throw off her bonnet and shawl and as abruptly decide on remaining at home. Even the awkward precautions she took not to disturb him were in themselves a disturbance. Now that she was gone, he got on rapidly and made up for lost time. Every Sunday he went to Etioles more in love and more learned than before. The Doctor was delighted at his pupil's progress; before a year would be over, at that rate, he would be able to take his degree and pass his first term at the medical college. The word degree made Jack smile with delight, and when he pronounced it before the Bélisaires, whose mate he had again become after a fresh freak of Ribarot's, the little garret in the Rue des Panoyaux was really lighted up and



aggrandized by it. The bread-carrier, in her enthusiasm had been seized with a sudden liking for science. In the evenings, when she had finished her mending, she insisted on Bélisaire teaching her to read, following the letters with the ends of her square fingers that hid them as she pointed them out. If, however, Monsieur Rivals was delighted at Jack's progress, he was far from satisfied with his health. Since the beginning of autumn, his former cough had returned, hollowing his cheeks, lighting up his eyes with a bright glitter, and giving to his hand the burning touch of fire.

"I don't like that," said the worthy man, watching his pupil anxiously; "you work too hard, your mind is too excited, too heated. You must put the drag on, go a little slower. You have plenty of time, hang it! Cécile is not going away."

No indeed, she was not going away. Never had she been more loving, more attentive, nearer to him; it seemed as if she guessed all the wealth of affection that lay in him and had never been satisfied, the tardy share of happiness that the outcast was to find in her. This it was that spurred Jack on and gave him an eagerness for work that nothing could moderate. Whatever he did, he felt no fatigue, not even when he worked seventeen hours a day, depriving himself of sleep; and in the unnatural excitement which endowed him with untold strength, the press at the Eyssendeck factory weighed no more in his hands than his pen.

The resources of the human body are inexhaustible. Jack, by treating his with exciting nights of work and absolute indifference, had reached, like the Indian Fakirs, that intense state of feverishness when pain itself becomes a sort of pleasure. He even blessed the cold of his garret, which drew him at five o'clock from his heavy youthful

sleep, and the little dry cough that kept him up and wakeful far into the night. Sometimes, at his table, he felt all of a sudden a lightness in his whole being, the lucidity of a Seer, an extraordinary enhancement of his intellectual faculties mingled with a faltering weakness. It was like evanescence into a higher sphere. Then his pen would run along rapidly, all the difficulties of his task disappear. He would certainly have reached the end he had in view, but on condition that nothing should cross the path in which he had launched himself at full speed. In such a case, it is true, the least shock is dangerous, and he was about to receive a terrible one.

*Do not come to-morrow. We are leaving home for a week.*

RIVALS.

Jack received this dispatch of the Doctor's, one Saturday evening while Madame Bélisaire was ironing his best shirt for the morrow, and he himself was already cheered, by the feeling that Saturday's evening was almost the beginning of Sunday. The unexpectedness of this departure, the brevity of the despatch, all, even the indifference of the printed letters, replacing the well-known and friendly handwriting, inspired him with a singular dismay. He awaited a letter from Cécile or the Doctor to explain the mystery, but he did not receive any, and during a whole week, shaken by every kind of terror, he passed from shivers of anguish to transports of hope, his heart heavy or light, without any greater motive than a passing cloud darkening or revealing the sun.

The truth was that neither the Doctor nor Cécile had left, and that Monsieur Rivals had kept the lover at a distance in order to have time to prepare him for a dreadful blow, a sudden, unheard-of decision of Cécile's,

about which he still hoped his granddaughter would change her mind. It had been a sudden thing. One evening on his return home the Doctor had found Cécile with a strange expression in her face, something sombre and resolute in the pallor of her lips, and the unusual quiver of her beautiful brown eyebrows.

He strove, but in vain, to make her smile during the dinner, and, suddenly, on his remark, "Jack will be here on Sunday," she said :

"I do not wish him to come."

He looked at her in amazement. She repeated, pale as death, but in a very firm voice :

"I do not wish him to come any more."

"Why, what has happened?"

"A very serious thing, grandfather—my marriage with Jack is impossible."

"Impossible? You alarm me. What has taken place?"

"Nothing, only I see things differently now. I was mistaken, I do not love him."

"Mercy upon us! What has happened? Cécile, my child, come to yourself. You have had a lover's quarrel, some childish discussion?"

"No, grandpapa, I can assure you there is nothing childish in this. I feel only a sister's affection for Jack, that is all. I have tried to love him; I now see that it is impossible."

The Doctor had a moment of terror; the recollection of his daughter crossed his mind.

"You love another?"

She blushed.

"No, no, I love no one. I do not wish to marry, that is all."

To all Monsieur Rivals' questions, to all his pleadings Cécile had but one answer :

"I do not wish to marry."

He tried to appeal to her pride. What would be thought of her in the neighbourhood? That young man who for months had been coming to the house, whom everybody knew to be affianced to her. He felt himself full of a pity that he would have wished to make her share.

"Reflect that it will be a terrible blow, his life blighted, his prospects ruined."

A spasm passed over Cécile's features, showing how much she was moved. Monsieur Rivals took her hand.

"Little one, I implore you, do not be in a hurry to take such a dreadful resolution. Wait a little longer. Think it over."

But quietly and energetically, she replied:

"No, grandfather, it is impossible. I wish him to be informed of my decision at the earliest opportunity. I know I am going to make him very unhappy, but the longer we wait, the worse it will be. Each day we put off will be but an aggravation of the evil. And I really should suffer too much if I let him remain under a false impression. I felt incapable of such a lie, such treachery."

"Then, I am to give him notice to quit?" said the Doctor, angrily, as he rose from his seat, "very well, it shall be done. But good God! women—"

She looked at him with such a despairing glance, such quivering pallor, that he stopped short in the middle of his rage.

"No, no, my child, I am not angry. Only for a minute. After all, it is all much more my fault than yours. You were too young. I ought not— Ah, fool, old fool, that I am! Shall I do nothing but foolish things all my life?"

The dreadful affair was to write to Jack. He tried two or three rough copies, all of which began as follows: "Jack, my lad, the little one has changed her mind." He could not find another word to add. "The little one has changed her mind." At last he thought: "I prefer speaking to him." And in order to gain time, to prepare for the painful interview, he put off Jack's visit for a week, with a vague hope that Cécile might perhaps alter her decision before the week's end.

During that week they did not once allude to the subject. But, on the following Saturday, when Monsieur Rivals said to his granddaughter:

"He will come to-morrow. Are you still in the same mood? Is your determination irrevocable?"

"Irrevocable!" she replied, firmly, letting each syllable of this inhuman word fall slowly and heavily one after the other.

Jack according to his custom arrived early on Sunday, and made one bound from the Evry station to Etioilles. He was fearfully agitated as he crossed the threshold—a friendly threshold however, that ought by its former cordial welcomes to have reassured him.

"Monsieur is waiting for you in the garden," said the maid, as she opened the door to him.

Then he at once felt his heart grow cold, and guessed that some dreadful calamity was about to befall him. The disturbed countenance of the Doctor completed his terror. The latter, whom forty years of anxious watch by sick bedsides ought to have hardened, seemed as trembling and agitated as Jack.

"Cécile is not here?" were the poor lad's first words.

"No, my child, I have left her—yonder. Where we went. She will remain there some time."

"A long time?"

"Yes, a very long time."

"She won't—she won't have me any more, Monsieur Rivals?"

The Doctor did not answer. Jack sat down on a bench, that he might not fall. They were at the end of the garden. Around him, the soft clear November day, the white rime spread over the ground, the floating mist veiling a red sun, recalled to him the day spent at Coudray, the vintage, the hillside overlooking the Seine, and the first lisplings of love that had on that day broken forth amid the surroundings of Nature, like the timid cry of a bird trying its wings for the first time. What an anniversary! After a moment's silence, the Doctor put his fatherly hand on Jack's shoulder:

"Jack," he said, "do not despair. She may still change her mind. She is so young! It may only be a caprice!"

"No, Monsieur Rivals, you know very well that Cécile is not capricious. It would be too dreadful to stab a heart through a mere caprice. No. I am sure she had reflected well before taking this decision, and that it has been a terribly painful one. She knew what her love was in my life, and that in taking it from me, my whole life must go with it. If, therefore, she has done this, it is that she has thought it her duty. I ought to have foreseen it. Was it possible for me to have such happiness! If you knew how often I have said to myself: 'It is too good. It will not be.' Alas! I was right."

By an effort of will he forced back the sob that choked him. He rose with difficulty. Monsieur Rivals took his hands.

"Forgive me, my dear child. It is I who am to blame in all this. But I thought to make two children happy."

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"No, Monsieur Rivals, do not reproach yourself. What has happened, was fated. Cécile was too far above me to love me. The pity she felt for me deceived her, her kind heart misled her. Now she sees clearly, and the distance that separates us has frightened her. No matter! Listen, my dear friend, and repeat this to her from me. There is one thing that will ever prevent my bearing her ill will, however cruel may be the blow she is inflicting."

He showed the fields, the sky, the whole horizon with a sweeping gesture.

"Last year, on a day such as this, I felt that I loved Cécile, I believed that she might love me; and I began the happiest, the only happy period in my life—a whole year of incomparable felicity, which, now that I look back upon it, seems to have summed up a whole existence. That day I was born, to-day I die. But that blessed time—that momentary forgetfulness of cruel fate—I owe that to you and to Cécile. I shall never forget it."

He gently withdrew his hands from the quivering grasp of the Doctor.

"You are going away, Jack? You will not breakfast with me?"

"No thank you, Monsieur Rivals! I should be too pitiful a guest."

He went down the garden with a firm step, crossed the threshold and rapidly disappeared without once looking round. Had he done so, he would have seen up yonder, on the first floor, behind the white curtain drawn aside, his beloved, as pale and trembling as himself, weeping as she stretched out her arms towards him, without however calling him back. The following days were sad at the Rivals'. The little house, brightened and rejuvenated during the last months, resumed the gloomy aspect of

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former days, more gloomy, indeed, for all the departed joyousness. The Doctor, worried and anxious, watched his granddaughter, her solitary strolls in the garden and her long visits to her mother's room, that she had now thrown open and seemed to take possession of—entitled thereto, as it were, by her grief. There, where Madeleine had wept of old, Cécile wept now, and the poor grandfather might have imagined, as he caught sight of a youthful face bent low, by the window, in the silence and affliction of unavowed sorrow, that his daughter was still there. Was she also going to die? Wherefore? What was the cause of this grief? If she no longer loved Jack, why this sadness, this craving for solitude, this languor that the enforced activity of household duties could not dispel? And if she still loved him, why did she reject him? He felt, poor kindly man, that there was some mystery, some mental struggle going on; but at the least word, the slightest question, Cécile baffled him, avoided him as though she felt responsible to herself only, in the supreme decision of her conscience. In presence of his granddaughter's attitude, which alarmed the worthy Doctor, he almost forgot Jack's grief; his own anxiety monopolized his thoughts, and the gig that carried him off at all hours, his old horse, now more and more undisciplined, might have told of his agitation by his whimsical manner of driving.

One night, the house bell rang to summon him to a patient. It was old Mother Salé, who awaited him lamenting on the road. It seemed that this time "her man, her poor man, had decided on dying." Monsieur Rivals, whose grief and age did not prevent his being always ready to start off at the first call, hurriedly went up to Les Aulnettes. The Salés lived near "*Parva domus*," in a regular burrow, hollowed out under the road-



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way, a room into which one groped as into a cellar, dirty, sombre, hardly shutting out the weather—a kind of peasant's lair of the time of La Bruyère which had outlived all the neighbouring châteaux. For flooring, the beaten earth; for furniture, a tumble-down press and broken wooden stools; the whole lit up by a large fire made of stolen wood, crackling and full of sap. Moreover, everything about the place spoke of thieving: the fragments of woodwork heaped up against the walls, the gun lying in the corner of the chimney, with the traps and snares, and the enormous nets that poachers throw in autumn over the harvested fields, as fishermen cast a sweep net. On a pallet, in a dark corner, amid all this dishonest squalor, the old man lay dying—dying of sixty years' poaching, night watching in the ditches, in the snow, in the marshes, of desperate flights from the pursuing gamekeepers. The life of an evil-doing animal, lucky indeed to end in his hole. When he went in, Monsieur Rivals was choked by the odour of burnt aromatic herbs that prevailed over the natural stench of the den.

“What the devil have you been burning here, Mother Salé?”

The old woman hesitated, tried to invent a lie; but without leaving her time, he added:

“The neighbour has been here, then, the poisoner?”

Monsieur Rivals was not mistaken. Hirsch had latterly been there, and had tried on the poor wretch his sinister medication by perfumes. The opportunities for these experiments were getting rare. The peasants mistrusted him; moreover, he was obliged to be very careful, on account of the Etiolles doctor, who waged a relentless warfare against this unauthorized doctoring. Twice already he had been summoned before the magistrates at Corbeil.

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and threatened with the severest penalties if he continued practising.

But the near vicinity of the Salés, their poverty-stricken condition, notwithstanding his dread of the constable, had again tempted him.

“Quick, quick!—open the window, the door! Don’t you see he is suffocating, poor devil!”

The old woman hurriedly executed the doctor’s orders, as she muttered :

“Ah, my poor man, my poor man! He said so much he would cure him. Is it possible to deceive poor creatures like that! Poor ignorant, stupid peasant that I am!”

While Monsieur Rivals, leaning over the dying man, felt his almost imperceptible pulse to see what amount of life still lingered, a hollow voice issued forth from the rags on the pallet bed :

“Tell him, wife—you said you would tell him.”

Monsieur Rivals turned to Mother Salé, whose old squaw-like face had become brick-coloured. She drew near stammering :

“Ah yes! to be sure! It is his fault, also—that doctor fellow—if I grieved the poor young lady, who is so kind.”

“Which young lady? Who are you speaking of?” asked the Doctor abruptly, dropping his patient’s wrist.

She hesitated. But the poacher’s voice, growing weaker and fainter as though it came from afar, again murmured :

“Tell him—I insist on your telling him.”

“Well there, I’ll tell him,” said the old woman resolutely. “This is what it is, my good Monsieur Rivals; that blackguard gave me twenty francs—what bad folk there are, good Heavens!—he gave me twenty francs if I would

go and tell Mademoiselle Cécile the story of her papa and mamma."

"Wretch!" cried old Rivals with a rage that gave him back all the strength and impetuosity of his youth.

He seized hold of the horrible woman, and shook her roughly.

"You dared do that?"

"It was for the sake of the twenty francs, my good gentleman. If that dreadful man had not given me twenty francs I would have died sooner than have spoken. In the first place, as truly as there lies a dying Christian, I know nothing at all, at all, of the story! It was he who told me everything, that I might repeat it."

"Ah, the scoundrel, he told me he would be revenged. But who could have informed him, and so well directed his vengeance?"

A deep plaint, a confused wail, such as a man utters when he comes into the world or leaves it, recalled the Doctor to the side of the old man. Now that she had "told it," father Salé let himself die, and perhaps that one little scruple of conscience amid all the crimes committed by this old vagabond, made the dread moment easier for him. Till morning the Doctor remained watching by that bed of agony, watching the spark of life, which the dawning day striking upon the window-panes with its white rays was going to bear away in its first shimmer. It required all his courage to stay there face to face with that dying man, and that hag crouching by the hearth, who dared neither speak nor look at him. Bound by duty, he mused, and from one thought to another strove to gather together and unravel the still obscure threads of this infamous plot. When all was over, he quickly returned to Etiolles, not, however, without having ascertained that the infamous Hirsch was no longer at "*Parva domus*."

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Ah ! if he had caught him at this moment, how furiously the impetuosity of the naval surgeon would have returned to crush the mean coward, who, to revenge himself, had struck him through his granddaughter. On getting home he went straight up to Cécile's room. Nobody ! The bed had not even been slept in. A cold shudder ran through him. He went to the "surgery." Still no one. Only Madeleine's former room was open, and there, amid the relics of the beloved dead, on the *prie-Dieu*, where all her grief had been poured forth, he found Cécile asleep, in a drooping attitude that told of a night spent in prayer and tears. At the sound of the Doctor's step, she opened her eyes :

"Grandfather !"

"Those wretches have told you, then, the secret we hid with such difficulty from you. Oh God ! such efforts made, such care taken to spare you this sorrow ; and then to have it told you, thrust on you by strangers and enemies ! Poor little one !"

She had hid her head on his shoulder :

"Do not speak to me. Do not tell me anything. I am ashamed !"

"I must speak to you though. Ah, if I could have guessed the cause of your refusal ! For this is the reason, is it not, that you have not chosen to marry ?"

"Yes."

"And why ? Explain to me your idea."

"I would not confess my mother's dishonour, and my conscience obliged me to tell all to the man who was about to become my husband. There was but one thing to be done, and I have done it."

"Then you love him still ?"

"With all my heart. I think also that he loves me well enough not to have broken off our marriage, but it

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was my duty to spare him such a sacrifice. You do not choose for wife a nameless girl, who, if she had a name, would bear that of a forger and thief."

"You are mistaken, my child. Jack was very proud and very happy to marry you; and yet he knew your history. I myself told it him."

"Is it possible?"

"Ah! naughty little one, if you had confided in me, how easily I could have spared you this threefold stab you have inflicted on our happiness."

"Jack knew then who I was?"

"I thought fit to tell him a year ago, when he told me of his love."

"And he was still willing to have me?"

"Child! As he loved you— Moreover, your destinies are so similar. He has no father, either; and his mother was never married. The only difference between you, is that your mother was a saint, while his . . ."

And then, just as he had related to Jack Cécile's history, in like way Monsieur Rivals related to Cécile Jack's history; the long martyrdom of the unhappy lad, so good and affectionate, his neglected childhood, his exiled youth; and suddenly as if all the past, as he recalled it, made him better understand the present, he exclaimed:

"But now I think of it, it is she—the blow comes from her. She has probably spoken before Hirsch of your marriage. Yes, yes, I feel certain of it now. It is by that mad creature that the drama I had so carefully concealed has reached you. It was fated. Such a blow, struck at that unfortunate fellow, could only come from his mother."

As she listened to these explanations, Cécile was seized with violent despair at having inflicted on the already

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unhappy Jack such useless and terrible pain. She longed to implore his pardon, to humble herself before him.

"Jack ! Poor darling ! " she repeated amid sobs.

And judging by her own grief the wound she had inflicted on him :

"Oh ! how he must have suffered ! "

"And he still suffers, you may be sure."

"Have you heard from him, grandfather ? "

"No ; but he might come himself to see you ? " replied the grandfather smiling.

"Perhaps he will not like to come back here, now."

"Well then, let us go to him. It is Sunday, he is not at his work ; we will find him and bring him back with us. Would you like that ? "

"Indeed I should."

A few hours later, Monsieur Rivals and his granddaughter were on their way to Paris.

Very soon after their departure, a man covered with perspiration, and bending under the weight of a heavy basket on his back, stopped in front of their house. He looked at the little green door, and the brass plate on which he laboriously spelt out : "DOC—TOR'S—BELL."

"It is here ! " he said at last, and he wiped his forehead and rang the bell. The little maid came to the door, but seeing one of those dangerous pedlars who ramble throughout the country, she only half opened it.

"What do you want ? "

"The gentleman who lives here."

"He is not at home."

"And the young lady ? "

"She is not in either."

"When will they return ? "

“ I don't know.”

And the door was brutally shut in his face.

“ My God ! My God ! ” said the hawker in a husky voice. “ Is he to be left to die like that ? ”

And he remained standing there, bewildered and stunned, in the middle of the road.





X.

THE PARVIS NOTRE-DAME.



The great waiting-room was filled.



THAT evening the Editor of the *Review of the Races of the Future* gave a grand literary soirée in his apartment near the Institute, Quai des Augustins. The "Failures," to the very last man, had

been bidden to this *fête*, given to celebrate Charlotte's return, which d'Argenton was to solemnize still further by the reading of his great poem—at length completed

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—*Broken Vows.* Strange circumstances had marked the ripening of this masterly work. With Charlotte once more returned to the fold, how was it possible to continue to deplore the absence of the ungrateful one, to describe the pangs of the abandoned lover? There was something ridiculous about it, and yet it was a pity, for never had the poet's inspiration been more flowing or more abundant. After a few days of hesitation, he bravely made up his mind :

“Well, it cannot be helped ! I shall go on. A work of art ought not to be at the mercy of circumstances.”

And the spectacle had been comical in the highest degree,—the poet lamenting over his mistress's departure, in the presence of the mistress herself, who listened while she was addressed as “cruel,” “faithless,” “dear truant,” and recorded all these fine epithets in her own handwriting in a manuscript book tied with pink ribbon. The poem finished, d'Argenton wished to read it to his followers, less from artistic vanity than from a lover's vain glory—to apprise all the “Failures” that his slave had returned and that this time he held her securely chained. Never had the little apartment on the fourth floor witnessed so sumptuous a soirée, such a profusion of flowers, of hangings and refreshments ; the white dress sprinkled with pale violets of the dear truant herself was harmoniously in keeping with the surroundings appropriate to the mute *rôle* she was to play during the evening. No one could have supposed, on entering, that any money difficulties lurked behind these splendours, like invisible spiders' webs hung upon butterflies' wings. Nothing, however, was more true. The *Review* was at its last gasp, its size diminished at each number, and it only appeared at long intervals, more and more intermittent. D'Argenton, after having swallowed up half his

fortune in it, was now seeking to sell it. It was even this lamentable situation, joined to a few well-managed nervous attacks, that had restored poor silly Charlotte to the "artist's" arms for ever. He had only needed to pose before her as the great man vanquished, worn out and abandoned by all, who now even doubted the guidance of the fitful star once clearly seen, for her to renew her most solemn vows :

"Henceforward I am yours. Yours for ever."

In reality, this d'Argenton was nothing but a fool and an impostor, but it may be said truly that he played on this woman with the most consummate skill, and knew how to draw from the commonplace instrument the most miraculous effects. It was incredible how she devoured him with her eyes at this *soirée*, how profound was her admiration for the sickly genius, whom she found as fascinating now, as when he had first appeared to her, twelve years ago, beneath the opal gas-globes of the Moronval drawing-room—more so even—for the setting was different, more comfortable, more luxurious, and the rays of her poet's halo were brighter and more numerous! For the rest, the surroundings were the same, and the actors in the farce immutable. Here was Labassindre in bottle-green velvet and the high boots pertaining to Faust, and Doctor Hirsch, spotted with chemical stains, and Moronval in his threadbare coat and his soiled white tie ; then there were the little "*pays chauds*," the clerical Egyptian with tight-drawn skin, the saffron-coloured Japanese, and the nephew of Berzelius, and the man who had read Proudhon. Here once more was the whole grotesque collection, gaunt, emaciated, starveling ; but ever full of illusions, with their fevered hands, and lashless eyelids, scorched by constant star gazing. One might have thought them a troop of Eastern pilgrims, on the

march towards some unknown Mecca, of which the golden beacon kept for ever retreating beyond the limits of the horizon. During the twelve years that we have known these unfortunate "Failures," some have dropped down by the wayside; but from the very pavement of Paris other fanatics have risen up to replace the dead and close up the ranks. Nothing discourages them, neither heat, nor cold, nor hunger, nor disappointment. On they go, pressing, hurrying forward, but they will never reach the goal! In the midst of them d'Argenton, better fed, better dressed, resembled some wealthy Hadji journeying among his filthy companions with his harem, his pipes and his riches. This evening the satisfaction of his vanity and the serene consciousness of triumph enveloped him with a new radiance.

During the reading of the poem, Charlotte, seated on a divan in an attitude of would-be indifference, kept blushing at the allusions which bristled in every strophe and, wrapped in transparent veilings, were only too delighted, like little disguised coquettes, at being recognized. All around, sat the wives of the "Failures," bent low in obsequious flattery, and among them, little Madame Moronval, who, when seated, seemed a large woman on account of the immeasurable height of her forehead and her length of chin,—dried her eyes at every turn to show her emotion. Such hypocrisy was hardly worthy of a Moronval *née* Decostère; but poverty beats down the haughtiest pride, and Moronval, seated opposite his wife, had his eye upon her, led the applause, and gave to his monkeyish face a thousand varied expressions of extraordinary admiration, all the while biting his nails furiously; which invariably foreboded an intention to borrow money. Before this well-trained audience, the verses unrolled themselves with a slow and appalling monotony, the

movement of a spindle winding an interminable skein. It went on, and on, and on ! It mingled with the crackling of the fire, with the sparkling of the lamps, with the noise of the wind straying through the balcony, and suddenly banging furiously against the window-panes, as on a certain memorable night. But this evening, Charlotte was not in the frame of mind which disposes the uneasy spirit to lend attention to omens and presentiments. She thought of nothing but her poet, nothing but the drama he recited, with much emphasis on the rhythm. The poem contained, however, one very dramatic part. In the last canto, d'Argenton represented that the dear truant, having at last crept back to the lover, was dying of the sufferings she had endured apart from him. The poet closed his eyes, while swearing an undying love for her :

*"J'ai mis dans la tombe avec toi,  
La meilleure part de moi-même,  
Ce qui te pleure et ce qui t'aime," \**

said he. And it was found so touching—this greatness of soul of the man who was willing to forget the past, and the sorrowful fate of this unhappy creature, that everyone sobbed as they listened, Charlotte more loudly than the rest ; for, after all, it was she who was supposed to have died, and these things touch you more when you figure in them yourself, than when it is some indifferent person.

All at once, in the midst of the pathetic passage, while d'Argenton was casting over the assembled guests a glance of satisfied vanity, the door of the drawing-room

\* " Shut within the tomb with thee  
Lies the best part of myself,  
That which weeps and loves but thee."

opened suddenly, and the servant, one of those familiar-mannered maids, with flying ribbons, such as one sees in these women's service, entered the room with a frightened air, crying to her mistress:

"Madame! Madame!"

All rose:

"What is it? What has happened?"

"There is a man."

"A man?"

"Yes, a horrid-looking man, who wishes to speak to Madame. I told him you were not at home, that you could not see him. Then he sat down on a step, and said he would wait."

"I will go," began Charlotte in great agitation, as if she guessed from whom the messenger came.

But d'Argenton quickly interposed.

"By no means. By no means."

And, turning towards Labassindre, the most muscular man of the party:

"Just go and see what this fellow wants."

"Certainly, certainly; *beûh!*" said the singer, and he went out squaring his shoulders.

D'Argenton, who had still another hemistich cut in two hovering on his lips, had precipitately resumed his place by the mantel-piece, ready to continue the interrupted reading. But the door opened again to admit the head and arm of Labassindre, who beckoned to the poet. D'Argenton, furious, rushed into the hall:

"Come, what is it? Out with it."

"It appears that Jack is very ill," said the singer in a low tone.

"Nonsense! Don't tell me that!"

"This poor devil says it is so."

D'Argenton looked at the poor devil, ugly and timid,



whose tall outline, bent in the doorway, seemed to be not unfamiliar to him.

"It is you who are sent by the gentleman?"

"No, I am not sent by him," replied the other. "He is too ill to be able to send anyone. He has been in bed these three weeks, very, very ill."

"What is the matter with him?"

"Something in his lungs, and the doctor says he can't live a week. So then we thought, my wife and I, that his mother ought to know, and I came."

"Who are you?"

"I am Bélisaire, Bel, as the lady used to call me. Oh she knows me well enough, and my wife too."

"Well, Monsieur Bélisaire," said the poet in a tone of banter, "you can tell those who sent you, that the trick is a good one, but I know it of old. They must try another."

"Beg pardon!" said the hawker, who did not understand "cutting words."

But d'Argenton had already shut the door, leaving Bélisaire standing aghast on the landing, while a half-formed vision flashed upon him, of a drawing-room seen at the further end of the apartment full of lights and people.

"It was nothing. Some one who had made a mistake," said the poet on his return, and while he majestically resumed his reading, the hawker went off at a great pace through the dark streets, through the sleet and biting wind, in haste to return to Jack—to the poor Mate tossing at this moment on the wretched bed in his garret. He had been taken ill one day on coming back from Etiolles. He had taken to his bed without saying a word; and ever since, he had been racked by fever; fever and a heavy cold, so severe that the doctor who

attended the works, warned his friends he was in danger. Bélisaire would have sent word to Monsieur Rivals, but this, Jack had energetically opposed. Indeed, he had only broken his lethargic silence on that occasion, and on another when he had sent the bread-carrier to sell his watch and a ring his mother had given him. Truth to tell, money was scarce in the Rue des Panoyaux. All Jack's savings had gone in buying the little furniture for the house at Charonne; the drawers had an empty sound, and the expenses of the wedding, and of setting up house, had left the coffers of Bélisaire equally void. No matter! in order to take care of that forsaken youth, the hawker and his wife felt capable of making any sacrifice. After having taken the mattresses and furniture to the pawnbroker, they had pledged a cargo of straw hats that must, at any cost, be redeemed by spring-time. But even this sacrifice was not enough. Everything was so dear—wood, medicine. Certainly they had no luck with their mates. The first one, an idle greedy drunkard; the second, perfection itself, now become a heavy burden through illness. In the neighbourhood, they were advised to send Jack to the hospital. "He will be better taken care of there, and he will cost you nothing then." But they persisted by a kind of pride in keeping their friend with them; as if they would have been wanting in their duty towards the partnership, in confiding him to other hands. Now they were at their last resources. And the danger of the illness coinciding with the imminence of this distress, they had resolved to let Charlotte know—"the fine Madame," as the bread-carrier said in an indignant voice. It was she who had sent her husband:

"Mind you bring her back with you, to make sure of her coming. To see his mother again will do the poor

fellow good. He never speaks of her. He is so proud. But I bet you he thinks of her."

Bélisaire did not bring her back, and he went home in despair, most uneasy as to the way he would be greeted. Madame Bélisaire, with her child asleep upon her knees, was talking in a low voice to Madame Levindré, before a melancholy and miserable little fire, what the poor people call "a widow's fire," and listening at the same time to Jack's painful breathing in his alcove, and the horrible cough that choked him. No one could have recognized in this unfurnished and lugubrious room, the bright attic overlooking the courtyard, where work seemed to sing aloud from early morn like a Parisian lark. No trace now of books or study. Nothing but a jug of tisane standing on the mantelpiece, filling the room with that heavy, nauseous, indefinable atmosphere that floats around the invalid. There was a sound of whispering, the click of the tongs, and the steps of Bélisaire returning.

"Alone?" asked the bread-carrier.

He related in a low voice that he had not been allowed to see Jack's mother, that the fellow with the big moustaches had not permitted him to go in.

"There are brutes for you! But you have water instead of blood in your veins. I know you and your fears. You should have pushed, forced your way in, cried out to that slut: 'Madame, your child is dying!'"

What a grand look of maternal love she threw upon the child, asleep upon her knees!

"Ah! my poor Bélisaire, you will never be anything but a chicken-hearted creature."

The hawker hung his head. He had quite expected a scolding on his return, but his timidity was too strong for him: the habit of perambulating streets and roads

under cover of his pedlar's licence, at the mercy of the police, had imparted to him a cringing attitude of humility that all the courage of his wife could not succeed in overcoming.

"If I had gone myself, I am sure I should have brought her," said the brave soul clenching her fists.

"Leave her alone, my dear," retorted Madame Levindré bitterly, "you don't know what these women are."

She said "these women," now that Ida de Barancy was gone, and that she had lost all hope of ever getting a sewing-machine for herself or capital for her husband's business. He too now came in. Every evening, thanks to the facilities afforded by the keys being left in the doors,—as in all poor dwellings,—they gathered together in the invalid's room, under pretext of asking for the latest news. On hearing that the lady had not come, Monsieur Levindré began a long tirade against the modern Phryne, the disgrace of our society, and once more unfolded his political system that was to rid the world of all this dross. The others listened with open mouths to the dreary and maundering twaddler, while the wind blew down upon the dying embers and Jack's hard cough sounded from under the sheets.

"That has nothing to do with it," said Madame Bélisaire, who never strayed long from her subject. "What must we do?—that is the question. We can't let this poor fellow die for want of proper care."

The Levindrés advised :

"You must do what the doctor told you. You must take him to the Parvis Notre-Dame, to the central relief-office. There, they will give you a card of admission to the hospital."

"Hush! Hush! not so loud," said Bélisaire, pointing towards the alcove where the sick man lay tossing in his

fever. There was a moment's silence, broken only by the rumpling of the coarse sheets on the sick bed.

"I am sure he heard you," added the hawker in a vexed tone.

"Well, what does it signify? He is neither your brother nor your son; and you would be well quit of him, by taking him to the hospital."

"He is the Mate!" said Bélisaire, putting into his way of uttering the word, all the pride and devotion of his brave simple heart. It was so touching, that the bread-carrier turned red with emotion and looked at her husband with tears in her eyes. The Levindrés went away shrugging their shoulders; and when they were gone, the room seemed at once less bare and less cold.

Jack had heard all. He always heard what was going on around him. Since this terrible relapse into his old disease of the lungs joined to the harrowing disappointment of his love had held him pinned down to his bed, he had not slept much, but voluntarily turned his back upon life and entrenched himself behind a silence that fever and its hallucinations even could not break. His eyes, turned towards the wall of his alcove, remained wide open all day long, and if the wall, the dingy wall, wrinkled and cracked like some old beldame's face, could have spoken, it would have told that in those fixed somnambulistic eyes was written in letters of fire: "Complete wreck, boundless despair."

Alone, the wall saw this, for the unhappy fellow confided his grief to no one. He even tried to smile upon his robust sick nurse, when she gave him boiling-hot beverages administered with kindly words of encouragement. Thus he passed the long solitary days; and the sounds of work sought him out even in his garret, to make him curse his forced inaction. Why was he not

strong and valiant like the others, and able to fight down the disappointments of life? But for whom should he work after all? His mother had left him, Cécile had given him up. The faces of these two women haunted him perpetually. When the commonplace and indifferent cheerfulness of Charlotte's smile had disappeared, the pure face of Cécile, enveloped in the mystery of her refusal as by a veil, rose before him; and he remained crushed, incapable of a word or sign, while the beat of his pulse and temples, his laboured breathing, his hollow cough fell into a measured rhythm with the surrounding agitation: the sighing of the wind in the chimney, the roll of the omnibuses on the pavement below, the droning noise of a loom in the neighbouring attic.

The day after this conversation by Jack's bedside, when the bread-carrier, returning from her rounds, her apron white with flour, entered the room to hear the night's bulletin, she was astounded by seeing a tall spectre up and completely dressed, holding a discussion in front of the fire, with Bélisaire.

"What has happened? You are up! How is that?"

"He would get up," said the hawker in despair. "He wants to go to the relief office at the Parvis Notre-Dame."

"To the Parvis Notre Dame! and why, pray? You think we don't take sufficient care of you here? What is wanting?"

"Nothing, nothing, my kind friends. You are two generous and devoted souls. But it is impossible for me to remain any longer here. I implore you do not try to keep me. It must be. I will have it so."

"But how will you manage, my poor mate, weak as you are?"

"Oh, I am a little shaky. But when one must walk, one walks. Bélisaire will give me an arm. He led me

along like that in the streets of Nantes, one day that I was not as steady on my legs as I am now."

Before so strongly expressed a determination there could be no further hesitation. Jack kissed Madame Bélisaire and went down stairs leaning on the hawker, after casting a silent and heart-broken farewell to the little home where he had spent such happy hours, indulged in such bright dreams, and which he well knew he should never see again. At this date, the Central Office was situated just opposite Notre-Dame; it was a square building of grey and melancholy aspect, and raised by a few steps. To get there from the heights of Ménilmontant, the road had seemed long indeed! They stopped often; at the stone posts, at the corners of the bridges, but without any long rests, because of the sharp cold. Beneath the lowering and heavy December sky the invalid seemed more altered and emaciated than in his alcove. His hair hung lank and damp with the perspiration caused by the effort of walking; and in his weakness everything turned giddily around him—the dark houses, the gutters, the faces of the passers-by, filled with pity at the lamentable figure cut by the hawker and his companion. They looked like two victims of the struggle for life which in this brutal Paris so resembles a battle, the one helping his wounded comrade to the ambulance before returning himself to the fray.

It was still early when they reached the Central Office, yet the great waiting-room was filled with a crowd that had long been seated on the wooden benches, around a great stove, where a fire crackled and roared. Over all was a suffocating, heavy, drowsy atmosphere, that seemed to communicate the same lassitude to the whole assemblage; to the poor wretches who came without transition straight from the cold of the streets to this hot-house, to

the clerks writing behind their glass screens, to the porter in charge who stirred up the stove with a limp and dejected air. When Jack entered on Bélisaire's arm, all glances turned towards him, peevish and anxious.

"Of course! Here comes another!" they seemed to say. And in fact, so great is the pressure in the hospitals, that every bed of suffering is enviously disputed and canvassed for. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the officials, although charity multiplies itself in every direction, there are always more sick people than places to receive them. In truth, the fierce turmoil of Paris life has the secret of breeding disease, of inventing, with the aid of vice, misery and all the combinations these two elements of sufferings bring with them—strange, complicated, and unfamiliar forms of illness. Numerous specimens of its handiwork were pitifully exhibited here on the squalid benches of this Relief Office waiting-room. As they entered, they were marshalled into two categories: on the one hand, the wounded, those who had been maimed, blinded or disfigured by wheels of machinery or steam-engines or other accidents; on the other, those who were suffering from fever, anæmia, phthisis; here were bandaged eyes, trembling limbs, coughs of all kinds, hollow and sharp; seemingly waiting for each other and all breaking forth together like the instruments of some ear-splitting orchestra. And then what tatters, what shoes, what hats, what a network of rags! Rags and tatters in their most abject shapes, rents filled in with mud, edges trailed in the gutter, for the greater part of these unfortunate creatures had come on foot, dragging themselves hither, like Jack. All awaited with profound anxiety the doctor's examination, which would entitle them or not to a ticket of admission to a hospital. Thus they might be heard talking among themselves of their



complaints, purposely exaggerating them, each one trying to persuade his neighbour that he was the more ill of the two. Jack listened to these gloomy conversations, seated the while between a big man marked with small-pox who coughed violently, and an unfortunate young woman, —who wrapped in a black shawl her mere shadow of a body,—with a narrow face, in which the nose and lips were so thin and so pale that the eyes alone appeared to be living, eyes rendered wild and wandering by the close approaching vision of death. A mumbling old woman, a basket on her arm, offered for sale biscuits and hard dusty cakes to these victims of fever and death, repulsed by every one, yet continuing her silent rounds. At last the door opened, and a little dry and nervous man appeared.

It was the doctor !

A deep silence at once reigned on the benches ; but the coughing redoubled in violence, and all faces grew a shade longer. While he warmed his fingers at the stove, the doctor inspected the sick people around him, with the firm and scrutinizing eye of knowledge, that makes the drunkard and the debauchee alike uneasy. Then he began to make the round of the room, followed by the porter who distributed the tickets of admission to the different hospitals. What joy for these miserable creatures when they were declared fit for the hospital ! What disappointment and what supplications when told that they were not ill enough. The examination was summary and even a shade brutal, for the numbers were great, and the poor creatures were terribly loquacious about their ailments, piling up all kinds of anecdotes and facts which the doctor did not require. It is almost impossible to imagine the ignorance, innocence and stupidity of such a crowd, the poor creatures hesitating even over a

name or an address to be given ; ever fearful, in their pitiable timidity, of compromising themselves and at the same time expatiating upon matter of perfect indifference.

"Well, and what is the matter with you?" the doctor asks a woman with a child of about twelve years of age clinging to her side.

"It is not me, Sir, but my boy."

"Well, what is the matter with the boy?—Come, make haste."

"He is deaf, Sir. It took him—I will tell you."

"Ah! deaf is he—of which ear?"

"Both chiefly, Sir."

"How chiefly?"

"Yes, Sir. Come, Edouard, stand up when you are spoken to. Which ear are you deaf on?" she says to the child, shaking him to make him stand up.

But he maintained an idiotic silence.

"On which side are you deaf?" repeats his mother, shouting at him.

And with this proof of the poor child's infirmity :

"You see, Sir, it is as I said to you—chiefly on both."

Further on, the doctor questioned the pock-marked man who was Jack's neighbour :

"Where are you in pain?"

"My chest, Sir.—It all seems burning."

"Ah! your chest burns. You drink a little brandy now and again, don't you?"

"Oh! never! Sir," replied the other indignantly.

"Oh, very well! You do not drink brandy then. But wine, you drink wine?"

"Yes, Sir, as much as I require."

"And how much do you require? Several quarts, I dare say?"

"Why, Sir, that depends on the day."

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"Yes, yes! I understand. On pay-days."

"Oh! pay-days, you know how it is. One is with friends."

"Yes, that's it, you get drunk every pay-day. You are a mason, paid once a week; you are dead drunk at least four times a month. Very well. Put out your tongue!"

The drunkard protested in vain, he was obliged to own his vice, for he had to deal with a judge rather than a doctor. When he reached Jack, the doctor examined him attentively, asked his age, and if he had been long ill. Jack replied with an effort, in a sharp whistling voice; and while he spoke, Bélisaire behind him winked and made signs with his great lips.

"Come, stand up, my lad," said the doctor, laying his ear on the sick man's damp coat, to sound him. "You came on foot?"

"Yes, Sir."

"It is extraordinary that you could walk at all in the state you are in. You must be famously energetic. But I forbid you to try it again. You will be put on a stretcher."

And, turning towards the clerk, who wrote out the tickets: "*Hôpital de la Charité.—Ward: Saint Jean-de-Dieu.*"

Then without a word more, he continued his inspection.

Amid the thousand rapid, confused visions that pass us by in the bustle of the Paris streets, is there anything more sad and heart-rending than those suspended litters, sheltered by an awning of striped ticking, and swinging between the footsteps of the two men, one in front and one behind, who carry it? It is half bed, half shroud; and the unseeing form vaguely outlined within it, at the

mercy of the jolting of the walkers, suggests sinister reflections. Here and there a woman crosses herself at the sight, as when a bier goes by. Sometimes the stretcher proceeds alone, along the pavement deserted at its approach ; more often, a mother, daughter, or sister, with eyes blinded by tears at this supreme humiliation of the indigent poor, follows this walking sick-bed. Thus it was that Jack heard the unequal step of the hawker, beside that of the porters, the honest fellow from time to time taking his hand, to show him that he was not altogether abandoned. With many a shock and jolt, drowsy and shaken, the invalid arrived at the Hospital de la Charité, and reached the ward Saint-Jean-de-Dieu, situated on the second floor, at the end of the second court-yard. A melancholy room, the ceiling supported by cast-iron columns, the windows overlooking on one side the gloomy yard, on the other, a damp and shady garden ; twenty beds foot to foot, two great arm-chairs by an enormous stove, a table and a great sideboard with a marble top. Such was the ward.

At Jack's entrance, five or six spectres in brown dressing gowns, with cotton caps on their heads, looked up from a silent game of dominoes to glance at the newcomer. Others, who were warming themselves, moved aside as he drew near. There was only one bright spot in the big room, the little glazed office in which the Sister sat, and in front of it, an altar to the Virgin, fresh and smiling, with its laces, its artificial flowers, its great candlesticks and their white wax tapers, and its plaster Madonna, whose arms in long floating sleeves spread out like wings. The Sister came to meet Jack, and in a small high monotonous voice, of which all the resonance seemed to be absorbed by her wimple and veil, said :

" Oh ! poor child, how ill he looks ! Quick ! we

must get him to bed. We have not a bed free, but the last one over there will soon be vacant. The occupant is at the very last stage. In the meantime we will put up a stretcher for him."

What she called a stretcher, was a sacking bed that the nurse of the ward arranged by the side of the couch that would so soon be at liberty, but whence at present came dull groanings, long sighs, rendered yet sadder by the hopeless indifference with which everyone listened to them. The man was going to die ; but Jack was too ill himself and too absorbed, to be affected by this ill-omened neighbourhood. He scarcely heard Bélisaire say "*au revoir*," while promising to come again next day ; nor a noise of pans and plates occasioned by the distribution of the soup ; nor a whispering near his couch, in which there was much question of number "*eleven bis*," who was said to be very ill. It was himself who was thus referred to. He was no longer Jack, but "*eleven bis*," of the ward Saint-Jean-de-Dieu. Although not asleep he was feeling drowsy and overcome by his great fatigue, when a woman's voice, clear and tranquil, caused him that abrupt start which dispels incipient sleep,

"Prayer-time, my friends !"

He vaguely saw near the altar, the shadow of a woman kneeling amid the heavy folds of her gown ; but he tried in vain to follow the rapid and rather sing-song recitation that fell from these lips accustomed to prayer, without any break, or stop for breath. Nevertheless the last words reached his attentive ear :

"Protect, Oh God ! our friends, our enemies, all prisoners, all who travel by land or by water, all sick and dying——"

Jack fell asleep then, a feverish, troubled slumber, in which the groans of the neighbouring death-bed were

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for him confused with visions of prisoners shaking their chains, and of travellers journeying along a road without an end.

—He himself is one of those travellers. He starts off on this road, resembling that of Etiolles, only longer, more winding, and lengthening at every footstep. Cécile and his mother are ahead of him, and will not wait for him; among the trees he can distinguish the flutter of their dresses. The obstacle that prevents him from reaching them, is a row of enormous machines, ranged by the side of the ditches, droning and roaring, casting darts of flame from their open mouths, and burning him with their fiery breath. Steam planes, steam saws were all there, incessantly moving their pistons, connecting rods, and hooks, amid a deafening noise of forge hammers. Jack, trembling all over, makes up his mind to pass between them; he is caught, torn, entangled; shreds of his flesh are torn away with shreds of his blouse, his legs are burnt by the masses of molten metal, while his whole body is enveloped in the blazing furnace and its heat penetrates into his very chest. What a horrible struggle to get out of this hell, and take refuge in the forest of Sénart which skirts this cursed road! And now, suddenly, Jack has become a little child again under the fresh shadows of the green boughs. He is ten years old. He is on his way home from one of his pleasant rambles with the game-keeper; but yonder, at the turn of the alley, sits old Salé on her faggot, watching for him, sickle in hand. He tries to run, but the old witch dashes after him, chasing him with a wild chase through the immense forest, now grown dark under the falling shades of night. He runs and runs, but the hag runs faster. He hears her approaching steps, the trail of her faggot, her panting breath. She catches him at last.

seizes hold of him, and with a final struggle throws him down and sits with all her weight upon his chest, which she crushes with her thorny faggot.

Jack wakes up with a start. He recognizes the ward, with its glimmer of night-lights, its rows of beds, and the smothered breathings and hollow coughs that rend the silence. He is dreaming no longer, and still he feels the same weight oppress his body; something cold, inert and sinister; something the nurses, attracted by his cries, hasten to remove and lay back in the neighbouring bed, while they draw the curtains tight round it with a dismal grating sound.





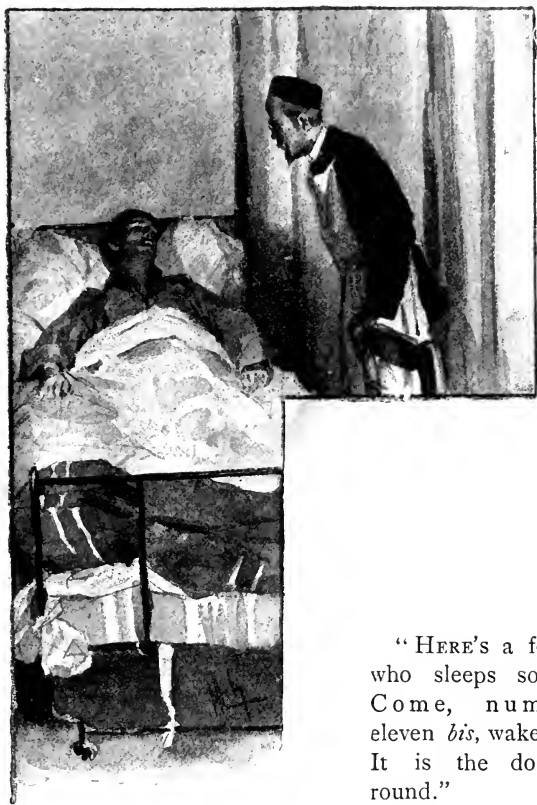


XI.

FORSAKEN.



" Jack, it is I ! It is Cécile ! "



“ HERE’S a fellow  
who sleeps sound!  
Come, number  
eleven *bis*, wake up!  
It is the doctor’s  
round.”

Jack opens his  
eyes, and the first  
thing that catches his  
sight, are the motion-

less coverings of the bed next to his, that now fall down  
limp to the ground.

“ Well! my lad, it appears that you were preciously

alarmed last night, by the poor creature who in his struggles fell on your stretcher. It must have frightened you dreadfully. Come ! raise yourself up a little, that we may see you. Oh ! Oh ! how weak we are ! ”

The speaker is a man of some thirty-five or forty years of age, wears a velvet-skull cap, and a large white apron coming up in a point over his chest ; he has a fair beard, and a keen and even satirical glance. He examines the patient, and asks him a few questions :

“ What is your trade ? ”

“ Mechanic. ”

“ Do you drink ? ”

“ I did formerly, but not lately. ”

Then there was a long silence.

“ What kind of a life can you have led, my poor fellow ? ”

The doctor said nothing further, for fear of frightening his patient ; but Jack had surprised on his countenance the same pained curiosity, the same sympathetic interest that had greeted him the previous day at the Parvis Notre Dame. The medical students surround the bed. The doctor explains to them the symptoms he has noticed in the patient. Very interesting and very alarming symptoms it appears. Each pupil, in turn, comes to verify the master’s observations. Jack submits his back to all these inquisitive ears ; and at last, amid the words : “ Inspiration, expiration, sibilant rattle, crackling at the summit and the base of the lungs, acute phthisis, ” he gathers that his condition is very serious, so serious, indeed, that when the doctor has dictated his prescription to one of the house surgeons, the Sister in charge comes up to his bed and gently, cautiously, asks if his family live in Paris, if he wishes to send for anyone, or if he expects any visits to-day, as it is Sunday. His family ?

Behold it. There it is, represented by those two beings, a man and a woman, standing at the foot of the bed, not daring to draw near, two rather common-looking but kindly faces that smile to him. He has no other relatives but these, no other friends. They are the only beings who have never pained him.

“Well, and how are you getting on? Do you feel a little better?” asks Bélisaire, who has been informed that his comrade’s life is despaired of, and who hides his terrible inclination to cry under an assumed boisterous mirth. Madame Bélisaire places a couple of fine oranges she has brought, on the little shelf near Jack; and after having given him news of her big-headed child, seats herself by the bed-side with her husband, who cannot utter a word more. Jack does not speak either. His eyes are fixed and open. What is he thinking about? Only a mother could guess.

“I say, Jack!” Madame Bélisaire suddenly asks, “suppose I went to fetch your mother?”

His dim eyes brighten, and rest smilingly on the excellent woman. Yes, that is what he longs for. Now that he knows he is dying, he forgets all the anguish his mother has caused him. He wants her there, near him. And already Madame Bélisaire is dashing off; when the hawker holds her back, and an animated discussion takes place in a low tone at the foot of the bed. The husband does not wish his wife to go there. He knows that she is very angry with “the fine Madame,” that she hates the gentleman with the large moustaches, and if they do not admit her she will make a desperate noise and row, and who knows? perhaps be carried off to the police station. The dread of the constable certainly plays an important part in Bélisaire’s life. The bread-carrier, however, knows the hawker’s timidity and how easily he can be got rid of.

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"No, no! don't be afraid, this time I shall bring her back," he says, at last, with an energetic assurance that he manages to impart to his wife; and he goes off. He rapidly reaches the Quai des Augustins; but he is still more unlucky than on the previous day.

"Where are you going to?" asks the concierge, stopping him at the bottom of the stairs.

"To Monsieur d'Argenton's."

"Was it you who came last night?"

"Yes," replies Bélisaire, in the innocence of his heart.

"Very well! In that case you need not go up, there is no one at home. They are gone into the country, and won't return for some time."

Gone into the country! in such weather, with this cold and snow in the air! This appears incredible to Bélisaire. In vain does he insist, in vain does he say how ill the lady's child is, at the hospital. The concierge revels in the tale, but none the less, will not permit the unfortunate messenger to cross even the mat at the bottom of the stairs. Bélisaire returns in despair to the street. Suddenly, a bright thought strikes him. Jack has never told him what had happened between the Rivals and himself, he has only said that his marriage was broken off. However, already at Indret, and in Paris when they lived together, they had often talked of the kind-hearted old doctor. Supposing Bélisaire went to fetch him, and brought a sympathizing, kindly face to the side of the poor dying comrade? Yes, that is what he will do. He will just go round by his house, fetch his basket of hats, for he never travels without it, and off he starts, bent and shivering, on the high road to Etiolles where he met Jack for the first time. Alas! we already know what awaited him at the journey's end.

All this time, Madame Bélisaire, sitting by the bedside

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of their friend, cannot make out why he is away so long, and has the greatest difficulty in calming the patient's anxiety, the thought of seeing his mother having thrown him into a state of feverish excitement. The throng of people, too, who on Sunday crowd the hospitals, augment his agitation. From the street, from the very bottom of the stairs, rises a hub-bub, a sound of steps that the echoing yards and passages prolong and render more distinct. At every moment, the door opens, and Jack watches the arriving visitors. There are workmen, little *bourgeois* tidily dressed, who move round the beds, talk to the patients they have come to see, encourage them, and try to make them smile by some anecdote, some family story, some thing they have seen on the way. Often the voices are choked with tears, although the eyes strive to appear dry. There are awkward phrases, embarrassing pauses, all the constraint and mental reservation that check words, when dropped from the strong lips of the able-bodied over the fever-tossed, crumpled pillow of the dying. Jack listens vaguely to the gentle murmur of the voices, above which floats an aroma of oranges. But what a disappointment at each fresh arrival, when, having raised himself by the help of a little wooden bar hanging from a cord overhead, he sees that it is not his mother, and sinks back, more crushed and despairing than ever. Jack, like all those who are near death, whose fragile thread of life is getting too weak to hold them to the robust years of youth, is carried back to the first hours of his existence. He becomes a little child again. He is no longer the mechanic Jack, he is the little Jack (with a *k*) the godson of Lord Peambock, the little fair-haired velvet-clad darling of Ida de Barancy, who is waiting for his mother.

But no one comes !

And yet lots of people come : women, children, little things who stop in surprise before the emaciation of the father, his convalescent's dressing-gown ; and utter cries of admiration, which the Sister has much trouble to repress, before the splendours of the little altar. But Jack's mother does not come. Madame Bélisaire has exhausted all her eloquence. She has suggested everything she could think of : d'Argenton's illness, a Sunday's excursion ; now she can find nothing more to say, and to keep herself in countenance, she spread a coloured handkerchief on her knees and slowly peels her oranges.

"She will not come," says Jack, as he said that other time in the little house at Charonne. Only his voice is more irritated than on that evening, and though weak has a thrill of anger : "I am sure she will not come."

And the unhappy man closes his eyes in a supreme lassitude ; and he broods over other griefs, and gathers together in his heart all the wrecks of his love, calling "Cécile, Cécile !" though not a sound issues from his silent lips. The Sister has drawn near on hearing him groan, and in a whisper to Madame Bélisaire, whose broad face glistens with tears, asks ;

"What is the matter with the poor child ? He seems to be suffering more ?"

"It is his mother, Sister, his mother who does not come. He is longing for her, poor fellow, and gnawing his heart out !"

"She should be sent for at once."

"My husband has gone for her. But you see, she is a fine Madame. She is no doubt afraid of soiling her dress in the hospital."

Suddenly, she rises in an outburst of indignation.

"Don't cry, my pet," she says to Jack as if she were



speaking to her little boy, "I will go and fetch her myself, this mother of yours."

Jack has heard her leave, but he goes on repeating in his hoarse voice, with his eyes ever fixed upon the door :

"She will not come ! She will not come !"

The Sister tries to say a few comforting words :

"Come, my child, calm yourself."

But he rises up, terrible, and in a sort of frenzy :

"I tell you she will not come. You don't know her ; she is a bad mother. Every grief of my life has been caused by her. My heart is bleeding with all the wounds she has inflicted. When the other one pretended to be ill, she ran to him at once, and would never again leave him. I am dying and she will not come. Oh ! the bad, bad, heartless mother ! It is she who has killed me, and she will not even see me die !"

Exhausted by this last effort, Jack sinks back upon his pillow ; and the Sister remains bending over him, striving to console and soothe him, while the sombre and fast fading winter's day, lugubriously closes in a yellow-coloured twilight full of falling snow.

Charlotte and d'Argenton were getting out of a carriage on the Quai des Augustins. They were in full dress—furs, light gloves, laces and velvet—and just returning from a large public concert. She was beaming. She had been exhibiting herself to the world with her poet ; and looked pretty with her complexion brightened by the sharp cold, muffled up in the winter luxuries that set off a woman's beauty, like a precious and brilliant jewel protected by the soft quilting of a casket. A tall, robust woman of the people, who was mounting guard in front of their door, dashed forward to meet Charlotte :

"Madame, Madame ! You must come at once."

"Madame Bélisaire," ejaculated Charlotte, turning pale.

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"Your son is very ill. He is asking for you. Come!"

"Really, this is too much of a persecution," said d'Argenton. "Make way. If the fellow is ill, we will send our doctor to see him."

"He has doctors, and more than he requires, for he is at the hospital."

"At the hospital?"

"Yes, for the present; but not for long, I can tell you. If you want to see him, you must lose no time."

"Come away, Charlotte; it is an infamous lie, a mere trap," said the poet, trying to drag her towards the stairs.

"Madame, your child is dying. Oh! my God, is it possible there can be such mothers as this!"

Charlotte could not bear it any longer.

"Take me to him," she said.

And the two women dashed down along the quay, leaving d'Argenton astounded and furious, convinced that his enemy was playing him a trick.

At the moment that the bread-carrier had left the hospital, two anxious figures could be seen hurriedly entering it, pushing their way through the stream of the departing visitors: a young girl and an old man.

"Where is he, where is he?"

An angelic face bends over Jack's bed:

"Jack, it is I! It is Cécile!"

It is indeed Cécile. It is in truth her pure face, paled with watching and tears; and the hand he holds in his, is the little tender hand that had been, in days gone by, so kindly, and yet had, to a certain degree, led him where he now was, for fate is sometimes cruel, and strikes from afar, through our best and dearest ones. The sick man opens and shuts his eyes, to be sure that it is not a dream. Cécile is still there. He hears her gentle voice. She

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speaks, asks him to forgive her, explains why she has inflicted such pain. Ah! if she could have guessed that their histories were so similar! By degrees, as she speaks, a great calm comes over Jack's heart, and his anger, bitterness and anguish disappear.

"So you still love me, you are quite sure?"

"I have never loved anyone but you, Jack. I shall never love anyone else!"

Whispered in this common ward, which has already witnessed so many lugubrious death-scenes, the word "Love" assumes an infinite sweetness, as though some wandering dove had sought refuge there, beating its wings against the folds of these hospital curtains.

"How kind of you to have come, Cécile! Now I shall no longer complain. It is nothing now for me to die, reconciled and with you by my side."

"Die! who speaks of dying?" said father Rivals in his gruffest voice. "Never you fear, my son, we will pull you through. You do not even now look the same as you did when we arrived."

Since a few minutes ago, he has in reality, appeared transfigured by the last flush of light, the last sunset glow, which waning existences and vanishing stars cast around them by a supreme and glorious effort. He kept Cécile's hand tightly pressed to his cheek, resting against it lovingly, and saying tender things in a low tone:

"All that I have lacked in life, you have given me. You have been everything to me: my friend, my sister, my wife, my mother."

But his exaltation soon gave way to an inert torpor, his fevered flush to livid faintness. All the havoc of disease became apparent on his features, slightly contracted by the difficulty of his laborious breathing. Cécile cast a despairing look at her father, the ward was filling with

gloom, and the hearts of those present were wrung by the approach of something more lugubrious, more mysterious yet than the night. Suddenly Jack tried to raise himself, his eyes wide opened :

“Hark! hark! Some one is coming up. She is coming!”

They heard the wintry wind moan through the stairs, the last murmur of a dispersing crowd, and the distant roll in the streets. He listened attentively for a moment, uttered a few broken words; then his head once more fell back and his eyes again closed. Yet he was not mistaken. Two women were rushing up the stairs. They had been allowed to pass in although the visiting hour was over. There are cases in which rules give way. When they reached the door of the Saint-Jean Ward, after all the yards and stairs they had so rapidly traversed, Charlotte stopped short :

“I am afraid,” she said.

“Come, come, you must,” said the other. “Really women like you ought not to have children.”

And she roughly pushed her forward. Oh! the dreadful bare room, the dim glimmer of the night-lights, the kneeling spectres, the shadowy outline of the curtains!—in one glance the mother saw it all—and further off, quite at the end of the room, a bed, two men bent over it, and Cécile Rivals standing, white as death, as pale as the dying man, whose head she was supporting in her arms.

“Jack, my child!”

Monsieur Rivals turned round.

“Hush!” he said.

They listened. There was a faint indistinct murmur, a short plaintive breath, and then a great sigh.

Charlotte drew near, tremblingly anxious. It was her

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Jack, that lifeless face, those outstretched hands, that motionless body, where her desperate eyes sought vainly a semblance of life.

The doctor bent down :

“ Jack, my boy, it is your mother. She is come.”

And the unhappy creature, with imploring hands, ready to dash forward, called out :

“ Jack ! It is I ! Here I am ! ”

Not a movement.

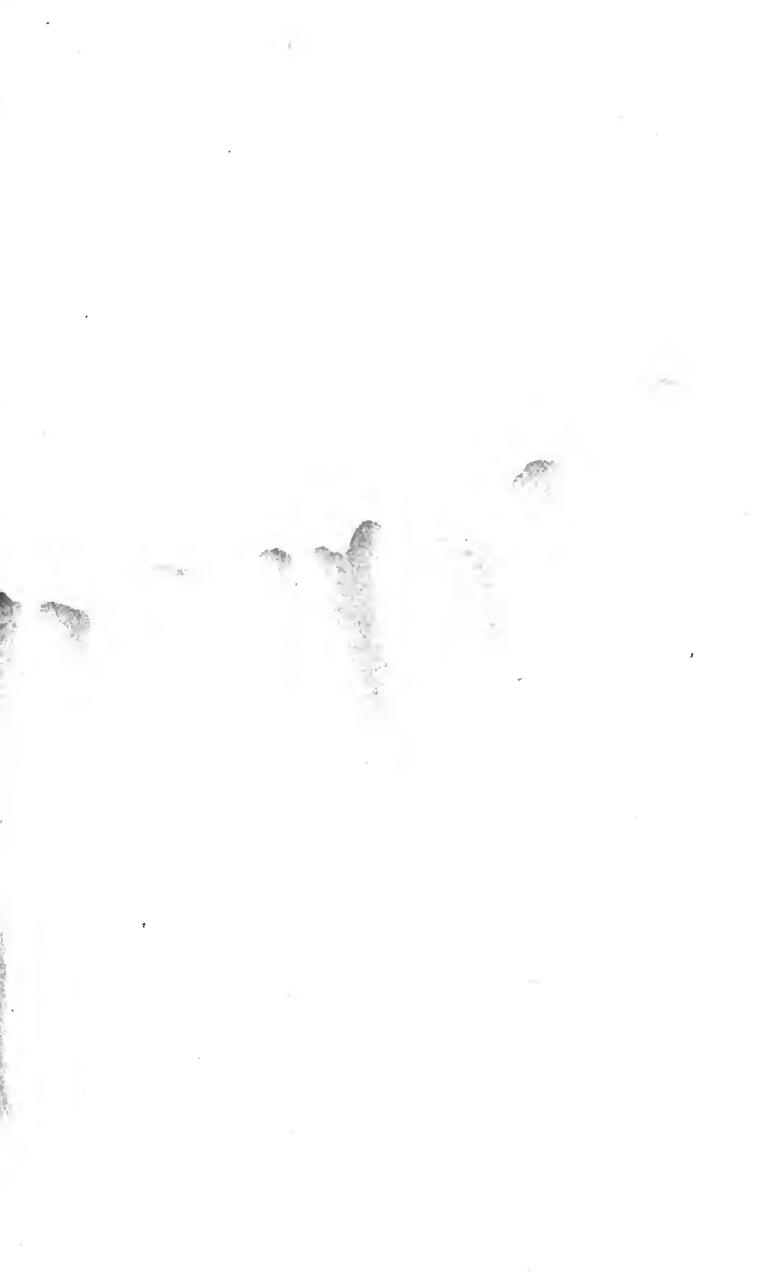
The mother uttered a cry of horror :

“ Dead ? ”

“ No,” said old Rivals, in a stern voice. “ No !  
RELEASED ! ”



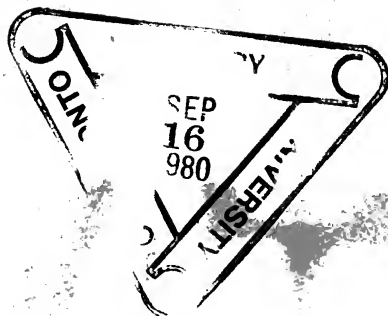












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Jack

